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FOREWARD

The Nevada Department of Education wishes to acknowledge all the time and effort of the many people who have contributed to the development and evolution of the Nevada school improvement process, SAGE – Student Achievement Gap Elimination.

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Preface: Rules and Regulations for School Improvement under the No Child Left Behind Act



The SAGE process was prepared in response to the new accountability requirements that were established both by the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and Senate Bill 1 (SB 1), enacted during the 2003 special session of the Nevada legislature. SB 1 was then passed into law and became part of the Nevada Revised Statute 385 (NRS 385). This preface details how schools are initially identified as being in need of improvement. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 expands the rules and regulations for school accountability to ensure that all students meet State standards. NCLB also changes how states determine whether schools make adequate yearly progress and delineates the school improvement procedures and consequences when schools do not make adequate yearly progress.

Adequate Yearly Progress

Each State plan defines what constitutes adequate yearly progress of all elementary and secondary schools, as well as school districts within the State. Adequate yearly progress must be defined in a manner that —

1. Applies the same high standards of academic achievement to all public elementary school and secondary school students;
2. Is statistically valid and reliable;
3. Results in continuous and substantial academic improvement for all students;
4. Measures the progress of public elementary schools, secondary schools, school districts and the State based primarily on the State assessments;
5. Includes separate measurable annual objectives for continuous and substantial improvement for each of the following:
 - a. economically disadvantaged students,
 - b. students from major racial and ethnic groups,
 - c. students with disabilities, and
 - d. students with limited English proficiency.

Each State established a timeline for adequate yearly progress, beginning in 2001-02, which ensures that all students in each subgroup will meet or exceed the State's proficient level of academic achievement on the State assessments no later than 12 years after the end of the 2001-2002 school year.

Each year, for a school to make adequate yearly progress¹—

- Each group of students must meet or exceed the objectives set by the State and
- Ninety-five percent of enrolled students in each subgroup must participate in the assessments.

First Year in School Improvement

If any elementary or secondary school fails to make adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years, the school district identifies the school for improvement. Each school identified for school improvement must, within three months after being identified, develop or revise a school plan in consultation with school staff, the local educational agency serving the school, and outside experts. The *school plan* must—

1. Include a review of the school’s accountability report and other data;
2. Include an identification of problems and/or factors causing the school to be in improvement;
3. Use scientifically-based research strategies to strengthen the core academics;
4. Adopt policies and practices concerning the school's core academic subjects that have the greatest likelihood of ensuring that all groups of students will meet State standards;
5. Establish specific annual, measurable objectives for continuous and substantial progress by each group of students to make adequate yearly progress to meet the State standards;
6. Include strategies to promote effective parental involvement in the school;
7. Incorporate, as appropriate, activities of remedial instruction or tutoring before school, after school, during the summer, and during any extension of the school year;
8. Determine strategies to improve achievement;
9. Specify the responsibilities of the school, the local educational agency, and the State educational agency serving the school under the plan, including the technical assistance to be provided by the local educational agency and the local educational agency's responsibilities;
10. Establish a timeline;
11. Develop measurable criteria for evaluating effectiveness of each provision in the plan (including increasing achievement, attendance or decreasing dropouts);
12. Describe resources available to the school to carry out the plan;
13. Provide a summary of effectiveness of Legislative appropriations to improve achievement and of programs approved by the Legislature.

¹ Title I schools that implement the schoolwide option must review the progress of all students at the school, but targeted assistance schools may choose to review the progress of only the students who receive services or who are eligible for services.

According to NRS 385, Non-Title I schools that fail AYP for two consecutive years must also comply with NCLB 6316(b)(3). Therefore, **Non-Title I schools that are designated** to be in improvement must complete two additional requirements, numbers 15 and 17 listed below, and include them in the NRS 385 plan.

For Title I schools in improvement, plans must cover a two-year period and include the four additional requirements below:

14. Assure the school will spend at least 10 percent of the school improvement funds to provide high-quality professional development to the school's teachers and principal that —
 - directly addresses the academic achievement problem that caused the school to be identified for school improvement,
 - meets the requirements for professional development activities, and
 - is provided in a manner that helps teachers participate in that professional development;
15. Describe how the school will provide written notice about the identification to parents, in a format and, to the extent practicable, in a language that the parents can understand;
16. Specify how the Title I funds will be used to remove the school from school improvement; and
17. Incorporate a teacher mentoring program.

Schools identified for school improvement must implement the school plan no later than the beginning of the next full school year after identification.

In addition to the school plan, a Title I school identified for school improvement must provide all students at the school with the option to transfer to another public school, including charter schools, and pay for the cost of transporting the student to the school the student attends.

According to NRS 385, all schools that fail AYP for two consecutive years must also be assigned a Technical Assistance Partnership (TAP) team by the district. This partnership sends a report to the State.

Second Year in School Improvement. If a Title I school fails to make adequate yearly progress by the end of the first full school year after identification, the school district shall—

1. Continue to provide all students enrolled in the school with the option to transfer to another public school,
2. Make supplemental educational services available to children, and
3. Continue to provide technical assistance.

Under NRS 385, any school that fails to make adequate yearly progress by the end of the first full school year after identification shall also continue to work with a Technical Assistance Partnership (TAP) team assigned by the district. This partnership sends a report to the State.

Third Year in School Improvement. If a Title I school fails to make adequate yearly progress by the end of the second full school year after identification, the school district shall—

1. Continue to provide all students enrolled in the school with the option to transfer to another public school;
2. Continue to provide technical assistance;
3. Continue to make supplemental educational services available to children; and
4. Take at least one of the following corrective actions.
 - a. Replace the school staff who are relevant to the failure to make adequate yearly progress.
 - b. Institute and fully implement a new curriculum, including providing appropriate professional development for all relevant staff, that is based on scientifically based research.
 - c. Significantly decrease management authority at the school level.
 - d. Appoint an outside expert to advise the school on its progress toward making adequate yearly progress.
 - e. Extend the school year or school day for the school.
 - f. Restructure the internal organizational structure of the school.

According to both NCLB and NRS 385, any school that fails to make adequate yearly progress by the end of the second full school year after identification shall also be assigned a School Support Team (SST) by the State.

Fourth Year in School Improvement. If a Title I school fails to make adequate yearly progress after one full school year of corrective action, the school district shall—

1. Continue to provide all students enrolled in the school with the option to transfer to another public school;
2. Continue to make supplemental educational services available to children; and
3. Prepare a plan to implement one of the following alternative governance arrangements.
 - a. Reopen the school as a public charter school.
 - b. Replace all or most of the school staff (which may include the principal) who are relevant to the failure to make adequate yearly progress.
 - c. Enter into a contract with an entity, such as a private management company, with a demonstrated record of effectiveness, to operate the public school.

- d. Turn the operation of the school over to the State educational agency, if permitted.

According to both NCLB and NRS 385, any school that fails to make adequate yearly progress by the end of the third full school year after identification shall continue to work with a School Support Team (SST) established by the State.

If any school identified for school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring makes adequate yearly progress for two consecutive school years, the school district shall no longer subject the school to the requirements of school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring or identify the school for school improvement for the succeeding school year.

Introduction to School Improvement

You are about to embark on a difficult and time-consuming but extremely rewarding journey of school improvement. It is important to remember that even though the academic achievement of students in your school may be growing significantly as you implement your school improvement plan, this growth may not be sufficient to remove your school from the needing improvement list. Though you may not be quickly removed from the needing improvement list, please take heart and know that your students will be better prepared academically because of what the staff at your school does. SAGE is not a cure-all. School improvement takes time. Change happens slowly but it will happen.

The focus of current state and national school improvement efforts is to increase student performance so that all students reach State standards, as exemplified by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. The underlying premise of these improvement efforts is that changes in the organizational structure of schools and how resources are allocated will better prepare administrators, teachers, parents, and community members to help students learn and meet State standards.

There have been many successful school improvement efforts. The education research literature includes hundreds of examples of school improvement that have resulted in increased student learning, improved parent involvement, decreased dropout rates, and an increased percentage of students who enroll in college—to name just a few. SAGE (Student Achievement Gap Elimination) provides schools with a framework for problem solving that allows school improvement planning teams to generate creative solutions that would not be possible without such a process or framework.

Schools participating in the accreditation process will find SAGE compatible. A crosswalk between Northwest Accreditation and SAGE can be found in Part III of this guidebook. At the end of each of the four steps in the guidebook will be instructions for accessing information about accreditation on the “Cut to the Chase” accreditation CD.

There are many obstacles to school improvement. Chief among these obstacles is that even though school improvement efforts target schools, schools are collections of individuals. To the extent that the needed changes involve the behavior of the members of the organizations, change must ultimately occur at the individual level. That is, individual teachers, administrators, and parents must in some way change what they are doing with the belief that this will change what students do (independently and in interaction with teachers) to improve student learning.

The purpose of SAGE is to help external facilitators, administrators, teachers, parents, and community members to lay the groundwork for school improvement, understand the process of school improvement, identify potential barriers, and develop a way to move the school from where it is now to an environment in which all students can achieve to their highest potential.

Many Nevada school districts and schools have used the improvement process outlined in this guidebook to improve student learning. SAGE presents school improvement as a four-step cycle that includes:

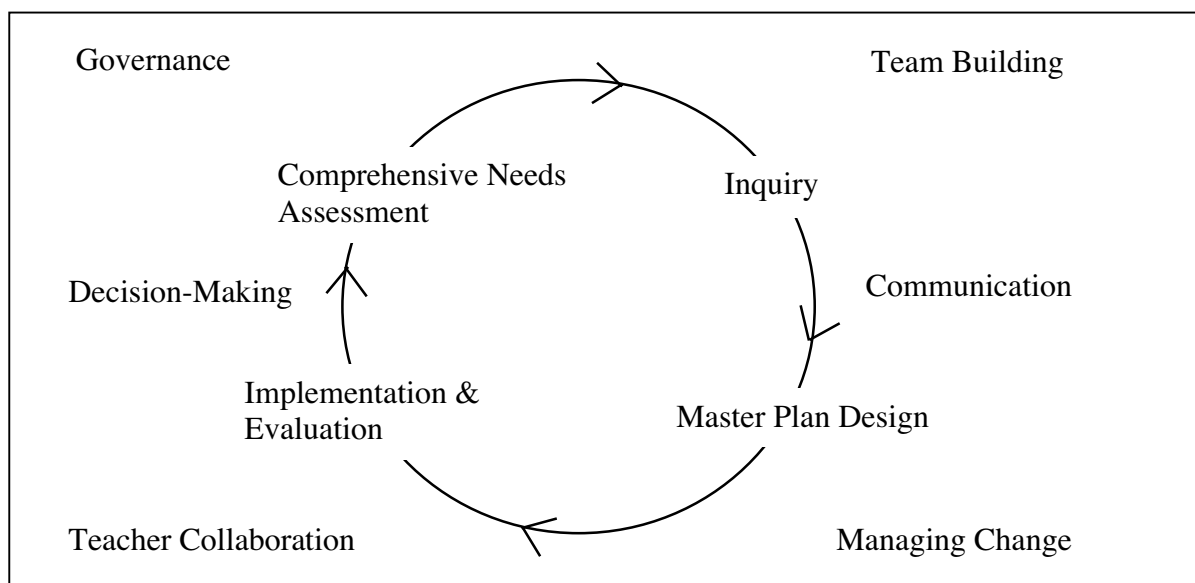
1. A comprehensive needs assessment to identify strengths, concerns, and goals;
2. An inquiry process to identify causes and possible solutions;
3. A master plan design that outlines how the solutions will be implemented, monitored, and evaluated; and
4. A plan to actualize and support the implementation and evaluation of the school improvement plan.

Once the initial plan has been developed and implemented, the four steps are repeated and become part of a **continuous improvement cycle** in which the school will regularly monitor and renew the school improvement plan as needed.

Following the four-step school improvement planning cycle alone does not ensure a quality plan that produces changes in the core academic curriculum and increased student learning. Other elements of support must also be addressed to facilitate the success of school improvement planning efforts. SAGE presents six essential foundations to support school improvement, and which planning teams should address when developing a school improvement plan. Attending to these six essential foundations helps planning teams lay the groundwork for successful school improvement. The six essential foundations necessary to support school improvement include:

1. Governance structure;
2. Decision-making process;
3. Teacher Collaboration;
4. Team building;
5. Communication; and
6. Managing change.

Figure 1 presents a model of the school improvement process and the six essential foundations as presented in this Guidebook.

Figure 1. School Improvement Planning Cycle and Essential Foundations of SAGE

The External Facilitator

The school improvement process in this Guidebook is greatly enhanced by the leadership of an external facilitator. An external facilitator can be an effective and neutral observer whose role is to help schools understand the planning process: how to include the six foundations and how to implement each step. The facilitator will also help school staff establish the structures and procedures that facilitate school improvement and avoid some of the barriers and pitfalls that schools commonly face.

Organization of the Planning Manual

The SAGE Guidebook is divided into four parts. The first part describes the six essential foundations to support school improvement: governance structure; decision-making process; teacher collaboration; team building; communication; and managing change. Planning teams can use these six sections to help lay the groundwork for school improvement planning and implementation.

The next part of SAGE is devoted to the four steps in the school improvement planning cycle: conducting a comprehensive needs assessment; completing the inquiry process; designing the school improvement master plan and supporting plans for monitoring and evaluation; and building a system for following the monitoring and evaluation plans, as well as creating a climate of ongoing review of school improvement activities.

Part III of the Guidebook contains Internet resources, references, requirements, and other information that support school improvement planning.

Part IV is made up of a set of appendices that contain “tools” to use throughout the school improvement process. These “tools” are in the form of worksheets and templates to help teams with various pieces of the process:

Appendices A through D contain planning worksheets to guide planning teams through the four steps of the planning cycle, respectively.

Appendix E contains an evaluation rubric that schools can use to evaluate their success with using the four steps and integrating the six foundations.

Appendix F contains assorted survey instruments for teachers, parents, and different ages of students, as well as information on conducting focus groups and interviews.

Appendix G contains overhead masters that will be useful for the External Facilitator.

To the Facilitator



The following information offers timelines and suggestions for leading a school through the SAGE school improvement process. This section assumes that the facilitator is familiar with the SAGE process, the guidebook, and has some basic knowledge of facilitation skills. Even though the process is presented as sequential, the steps and activities can overlap or be extended as necessary. Handouts are included in the SAGE binder Appendices according to their content, while overhead masters can be found in Appendix G.

AYP and School Improvement Plans

An elementary or secondary school that fails to make **adequate yearly progress (AYP)** for two consecutive years will be designated by its school district as a school in need of improvement. Each school identified for school improvement must, within three months after being identified, develop or revise a school plan in consultation with school staff, the school district serving the school, and outside experts. For Title I schools in improvement, this activity is in accordance with **No Child Left Behind (NCLB)**. For non-Title I schools in improvement, this requirement is established by state legislation – **NRS 385**. Besides fulfilling the legislative requirements, the goal of school improvement (through a school improvement plan) is to increase student achievement at the school.

In order to comply with NCLB and NRS 385, all schools must submit a school improvement plan or revised plan to their district by November 1 of each year. (See *Preface* of the SAGE guidebook for a list of specific school improvement plan requirements).

- Non-Title I schools and Title I schools not in improvement or non-Title I schools and Title I schools having failed AYP for one year may choose, with the approval of the district, which school improvement plan template they will use to submit their school improvement plan. However, the SAGE school improvement plan is highly recommended for all schools as it reflects the points of law under both NCLB and NRS 385. More importantly, though, this plan reflects the thoughtful process in which schools should engage during the school improvement planning process.
- Non-Title I schools that fall into improvement may also choose their school improvement plan template, with approval from the district, adding the minor additions that are required for a non-Title I school in improvement. However, a non-Title I school may also choose to follow the SAGE process and use the accompanying SAGE school improvement plan, with the approval of the school district.
- Title I schools in improvement must use the SAGE process and the accompanying school improvement plan template. Title I improvement plans must be peer-reviewed by the school district according to the criteria established by the Nevada State Board of Education.

1. Timeline

An External Facilitator (EF) should anticipate a two-year commitment when contracting to work with a school going through the school improvement process. The External Facilitator (EF) should be aware that a Title I school designated as being in need of improvement must complete its school improvement plan within three months of the date of designation. The EF should expect an intense relationship with the school during this planning time, including a minimum of 5-6 meetings with the school. It is also expected that the EF follow up with the school during the remainder of the planning year and maintain a connection with the school throughout the following school year to help monitor the implementation of the improvement plan. In the second year the EF might be meeting with the school at the start of the year, meeting with new administration and teachers concerning the focus of the school improvement plan, making periodic visits to the school and/or classrooms, and attending meetings with the School Improvement Planning (SIP) team and/or faculty to monitor and evaluate progress on the school improvement goals.

2. Pre-process meeting with principal

Meet with the principal and/or other administrators and together review the steps, foundations, and philosophies of SAGE school improvement. Though leadership is a crucial aspect of success in school improvement, help the principal understand that his/her role in the planning process is more participatory than directive.

Some important concepts to consider together as you plan ahead are represented by the Assumptions of School Improvement (Overhead Appendix G). School Improvement involves change and it is necessary to recognize this change from the beginning and plan for it.

Assumptions of School Improvement Model

- Change must focus on improved student learning
- School change must be comprehensive, not only one or two individuals
- Effective school change demands shared leadership
- All relevant stakeholders must be involved in the change process
- Effective change means changing the school culture

Other school improvement activities to be addressed with the principal:

- Meeting jointly with the whole staff and the EF to provide information and answer questions about the school improvement process.
- Ensuring school has or can secure access to student achievement and other data through the district.
- Selecting a School Improvement Planning (SIP) team (See Governance).
- Arranging non-evaluative classroom observations for the entire staff.
- Arranging surveys, focus groups, and interviews (See Comprehensive Needs Assessment and materials in Appendix F).
- Setting meeting dates in advance. Consider holidays, testing, etc.

- Writing the plan. Make it clear that neither the principal nor the facilitator writes the school improvement plan. The plan is written by the SIP team (of which the principal is a member) in conjunction with the staff.
- Meeting required deadlines.

3. Suggestions for SIP team meetings

The following tables contain suggestions for conducting four SIP team meetings. The schedules and activities may change or overlap according to the progress of the school. The first step, Comprehensive Needs Assessment, takes approximately 60% of the school improvement planning time, while Inquiry and Master Plan Design take up the remaining 40%.

Abbreviations in the charts: OH = Overhead available, HO = Handout available

First Meeting with SIP team			
Overheads/ Powerpoint	Handouts	Activity OH=Overhead available, HO=Handout available	Completed
		Introductions. Agenda. Discuss “Why are we here?” Inform about Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and requirements for putting together a school improvement plan.	
		Present overview of SAGE process (OH). SIP team receives SAGE school improvement process summary (HO).	
		Present Assumptions of School Improvement (OH) and discuss the implications of change, including the Implementation Dip (OH).	
		Discuss Foundations of School Improvement (OH). Due to time issues, during planning most focus will be on Governance, Decision-Making, Collaboration, and Communication.	
		Governance: Team establishes roles of Team Leader or Co-leaders, recorders, plan writers, researchers, etc.	
		Decision-Making: Discuss and agree to a decision-making process.	
		Collaboration: Discuss and approve meeting times, possible ways of including the whole staff.	
		Communication: Choose someone responsible for distributing minutes to staff and decide how to communicate with parents.	
		Choose someone to keep a “photo album,” a running collection of data and information gathered by the SIP team.	
		Introduce Comprehensive Needs Assessment resulting in a School Profile (OH). Review Conduct a Needs Assessment (OH) and Common Elements of a School Profile (OH). Discuss school’s progress in terms of plans for surveys, focus groups, interviews, classroom observations.	

First Meeting with SIP team			
Overheads/ Powerpoint	Handouts	Activity OH=Overhead available, HO=Handout available	Completed
		Review most recent achievement data as a whole group. Begin discussing and answering the questions in the Data Analysis Guide (DAG) for Student Achievement. Identify strengths and concerns (HO). Prioritize the identified concerns under Student Achievement. Develop 1 or 2 goals based on analysis of student achievement data.	
		Break into teams based on the 5 dimensions of the Data Analysis Guide (DAG)(HO). Review questions for existence of data.	
		Establish subcommittees (OH), 1 per dimension, headed by a member(s) of SIP team. Task for next meeting: See next steps below.	
		Decide how whole staff will be involved in data review, based on the identified goal(s). (e.g., Is every staff member assigned to a dimension? Is every staff member allowed to self-select a dimension? Will SIP team leaders invite individuals to participate?)	
		Review Tips in Analyzing Data, Data Source Reliability, Tips for Writing Narrative Statements about concerns (OHs).	
		Next Steps/Homework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Share process with staff and community (consider second language needs, as appropriate). ➤ Conduct Needs Assessment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SIP team meets with dimension groups to explain SAGE process, present identified goal(s), and examine DAG for existing data to answer questions in the 5 dimensions. • Dimension groups collect missing data and organize them to present to SIP team. Make copies, if necessary. • Dimension groups meet again to discuss data, answer guiding questions in the DAG, and to identify strengths and concerns. 	
		Debrief: 1. Clarify any questions. 2. Without discussion, each team member very briefly tells about insights, feelings, “ah-has” about the material, activity, meeting, process, etc.	

Second Meeting with SIP team			
Overheads/ Powerpoint	Handouts	Activity OH=Overhead available, HO=Handout available	Completed
		Agenda. Review SAGE steps and foundations (OH).	
		Review activities from previous meeting, where SIP team ended discussion, and what homework was to be accomplished. Use School Improvement Planning Checklist (OH) to keep track of completed steps.	
		SIP team briefly reports out on what each dimension group accomplished and presents their data for review, including the areas of strength and concern in each dimension, under each goal(s). EF presents whatever data s/he has compiled.	
		Discuss data, clarifying questions and looking for trends and patterns in the data, and triangulate data (OH).	
		Combine or refine concerns, focusing on Student Achievement goal(s) already established. Brainstorm possible causes for each concern (OH).	
		Compile School Profile: Organize any written answers to the DAG questions, the school's Accountability Report, and other data collected during needs assessment. This is archived in Appendix B of the school improvement plan template.	
		The team should review the Mission and Beliefs of the school and decide if they align with the goal(s) or if they should be revised or renewed. See the section in the SAGE guidebook, "Additional Information," on Mission and Beliefs.	
		At this time the team can begin entering information into the plan template: Appendix A for data tables, Appendix B for the School Profile, Mission and Beliefs, Strengths and Concerns, goal(s), possible causes.	
		Plan how to present School Profile to whole staff to discuss the main concerns.	
		Next Steps/Homework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Share process with staff and community ➤ Continue Needs Assessment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SIP team meets with whole staff to present School Profile • Staff reviews/clarifies data and discusses main concerns and possible causes 	
		Debrief: 1. Clarify any questions. 2. Without discussion, each team member very briefly tells about insights, feelings, "ah-has" about the material, activity, meeting, process, etc.	

Third Meeting with SIP team			
Overheads/ Powerpoint	Handouts	Activity OH=Overhead available, HO=Handout available	Completed
		Agenda. Review SAGE steps and foundations (OH).	
		Review activities from previous meeting, where SIP team ended discussion, and what homework was to be accomplished. Use School Improvement Planning Checklist (OH) to keep track of completed steps.	
		SIP team reports out on identified strengths and concerns. (HO).	
		Review steps to Inquiry (OH).	
		Brainstorm any further possible causes of the identified concerns under the goal(s) and document them with data. Investigate any causes that are undocumented. Remove any causes over which the school has no control.	
		Brainstorm possible research-based solutions. Line up at least one solution per cause. Research possible solutions on the Internet or through other sources.	
		Plan how to distribute information on causes and possible solutions to whole staff and gain input.	
		Next Steps/Homework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Share process with staff and community ➤ Inquiry: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SIP team gathers input from staff on causes of concerns and possible research-based solutions • SIP team continues to investigate any causes that remain undocumented 	
		Debrief: 1. Clarify any questions. 2. Without discussion, each team member very briefly tells about insights, feelings, “ah-has” about the material, activity, meeting, process, etc.	

Fourth Meeting with SIP team			
Overheads/ Powerpoint	Handouts	Activity OH=Overhead available, HO=Handout available	Completed
		Agenda. Review SAGE steps and foundations (OH).	
		Review activities from previous meeting, where SIP team ended discussion, and what homework was to be accomplished. Use School Improvement Planning Checklist (OH) to keep track of completed steps.	
		Complete Inquiry: Review input from staff on causes and possible solutions.	
		Refine solutions and compare them with criteria for adopting solutions (HO). Adjust the information in the school improvement plan template under causes and solutions, if necessary.	
		Master Plan Design: Review steps for designing master plan (OH).	
		For each goal, develop an action plan (HO). SIP team can divide up by goal. Insert final action plan into plan template.	
		Integrate the action plans into one master plan (HO). Very important for the school. Check for overlaps in time, resources, personnel.	
		Create Monitoring Plans (HO): Create a plan to monitor each action plan. Insert into school improvement plan template.	
		Determine final objectives (HO): Refine each goal into an objective with a goal statement, outcome indicator, baseline, performance level, timeline. Insert final objective into action plan template. Include any short-term objectives for monitoring.	
		Create Evaluation Plan (HO). Include any short-term objectives for monitoring.	
		Insert action plans, monitoring plans, evaluation plans into school improvement plan template. SIP team completes budget, being specific about how resources will be used to support action steps and goal(s).	
		Next Steps/Homework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Share process with staff and community ➤ Complete all sections of the school improvement plan template ➤ Have plan reviewed by staff members ➤ Submit plan to district 	
		Debrief: 1. Clarify any questions. 2. Without discussion, each team member very briefly tells about insights, feelings, “ah-has” about the material, activity, meeting, process, etc.	

Common Pitfalls and Tips

External Facilitators often encounter several common pitfalls in the facilitation of the school improvement process. The facilitator may want to review these common pitfalls and some of the tips to overcome them before beginning the school improvement process.

Pitfalls

- **Working in isolation** without sharing ideas with other facilitators or colleagues not at the school.
- **Forgetting the 6 Foundations of School Improvement**, not addressing them in meetings or encouraging the school to be addressing them in their daily routines.
- **Neglecting consistent representation on the SIP team** of district office, parents, or subpopulations.

Tips

- **Be positive.** Enter this process with a positive pre-supposition about the school and staff and maintain it throughout the process. If you need to discuss your own frustrations or concerns, do so with colleagues outside of the school, never in front of school staff.
- **Be informed.** Do your homework on the school, district, and community. Network with other facilitators or internet resources on school improvement. The Nevada Department Of Education is a good resource by phone, email, or website. Links to Nevada professional development and school improvement websites will be available during the summer of 2004. See the resource pages included in Part III of this guidebook.
- **Be neutral but supportive.** Sometimes a facilitator has to deliver negative information and sometimes schools have to go through a type of grieving process about that information. Staff may have feelings of anger, denial, or frustration. Recognize that these reactions are a normal part of the discussion without being drawn in by them. Be straightforward but remember to emphasize hope and moving ahead. Reinforce the positive signs in the data and daily functions of the school and personnel. Give teachers and schools the honest praise that they don't often get to hear. Keep facilitation free of personal opinions or agendas.
- **Celebrate successes along the way.** Seeing improvement in student achievement takes time. It is vital to recognize even small signs of positive change along the way, both in organizational accomplishments and student achievement.
- **Ensure representative membership on SIP team.** (See also Governance). In addition to members from the school, decide who will be involved from outside the school; for example, Regional Professional Development Program personnel, Title I representative, district office. It is important to keep a district office person connected

to the process and informed about discoveries and decisions being made at the school. Ensure consistent representation of parents and subpopulations throughout the process. Make sure non-education members are oriented to the process.

- **Plan for meetings.** (See also Team Building). Start and end on time. Use an agenda at each meeting. Briefly review the SAGE process and foundations at each meeting. End meetings on a positive note and with a debrief. Use ground rules. Consider holding occasional meetings at a more convenient time for the parent representative.
- **Communicate.** Keep the lines of communication open with the school in between meetings. Share email addresses with administration and the SIP team leader. Remind the SIP team to keep staff and parents updated about the process in a clear and understandable manner and in a language consistent with the languages spoken in the community.

PART I: Six Essential Foundations Supporting School Improvement – Overview



The cycle of school improvement outlined in SAGE involves four steps or phases: comprehensive needs assessment resulting in student achievement goals and a school profile; inquiry process; master plan design; and implementation and evaluation. All four steps are critical to school improvement. However, it is not enough for school planning teams to faithfully implement these four steps. School improvement is much, much more. To develop and implement a quality school improvement plan, schools must attend to six essential foundations that support school improvement. These six foundations are briefly defined below and then more fully described in the following sections immediately following the definitions.

1. Establish a Governance Structure for School Improvement: Create a School Improvement Planning (SIP) Team at the School Site

The governance structure for a school improvement effort is the group of individuals who manage the school improvement effort by first planning it and then monitoring its implementation. Research has found that the most common management change is to increase collaboration and accountability among teachers. A committee that includes teachers, parents, and administrators most successfully manages school improvement efforts.

2. Agree to a Decision-Making Process for School Improvement

The school improvement planning team must establish a system or process for how it will make decisions about the school's improvement efforts. There are many ways to make decisions, whether by consensus, majority, or two-thirds vote—to name a few. The particular way is less important, but everyone must understand and be comfortable with the way that is agreed upon.

3. Teacher Collaboration: Establish a Regular Time for Planning, Monitoring, and Professional Development

No later than the 2004-2005 school year, all schools falling into the category of needing improvement must submit their school improvement plans by November 1 to districts and by December 15 to the Nevada Department of Education. Therefore, in the beginning, planning teams must devote a significant amount of time to conduct the comprehensive needs assessment, explore and select the most appropriate solutions for the school, and create their master plan. However, the real business of school improvement takes far more time and ongoing effort. It will be crucial to the success of the school improvement efforts for schools to build in time to monitor implementation, train teachers in new instructional strategies, and

create ways to support ongoing professional development. All of these initiatives require that the school establish regular meeting time for staff to make sure school improvement activities occur in a timely, meaningful manner.

4. Encourage Team Building

Team building plays an important role in the success of school improvement planning. The internal task of team building is as important as the group's external task of making improvements. Nevertheless, teams and schools often underestimate the need to develop and sustain themselves as teams and the work required to do so. When a team runs smoothly, members can concentrate on their primary goal of improving student learning.

5. Plan for and Manage Change

Initial resistance to change in schools is predictable. It is also manageable. The emphasis must not be on simply overcoming the resistance to change but instead on getting the school staff to undertake the journey as a team. An important task for the planning team is to overcome resistance by planning for change. Schools that do not plan for change by helping staff make the transition may easily get bogged down in staff resistance.

6. Communicate to Staff and the School Community about School Improvement

Communication is central to school improvement efforts. Open communication encourages team building; helps prepare people for change; and informs staff, parents, and the community about the school improvement effort and how it will be implemented; and identifies people's roles in these efforts. The school improvement planning team must develop a system to keep the entire staff informed and involved throughout the entire process.

Governance for School Improvement



Research shows that a key feature of successful school improvement efforts is the type of management or governance structure used to oversee school improvement.² Most governance structures in successful school improvement efforts increase teacher accountability and management responsibilities, and are often referred to as participatory governance structures. These governance structures are based on the premise that decisions about student learning (which is the focus of school improvement efforts) must be made by people closest to the learner—including input from students, teachers, parents, and the community. A committee, the School Improvement Planning (SIP) team, comprised of the principal and other administrators, teachers, parents, and community members manages almost all successful school improvement plans.

Participatory governance structures can facilitate the development of a successful school improvement plan by:

- Dividing the work (e.g., needs assessment, research on effective solutions) among planning team and other staff members;
- Promoting stakeholder buy-in to school improvement efforts;
- Encouraging the implementation of innovative ideas; and
- Ensuring a comprehensive data profile of the school is developed.

Many districts in Nevada have already established or are in the process of investigating changes in school governance structures, similar to the governance structure outlined here for school improvement, as part of systemic education reform. The most common change in school governance is the introduction of site-based management through site-based councils. For schools that have already established site-based management, these councils provide an appropriate governance structure for developing and implementing school improvement.

Schools developing improvement plans should use the governance structure required by their district's education reform efforts. However, in the absence of such efforts, the school might select one of the methods of participatory school governance described on the following pages to manage the school's improvement efforts.

Models of Participatory Governance for School Improvement

In general, participatory governance models for school improvement can be classified into two general types: *representational* and *at-large*. Both increase teachers' and parents' roles in

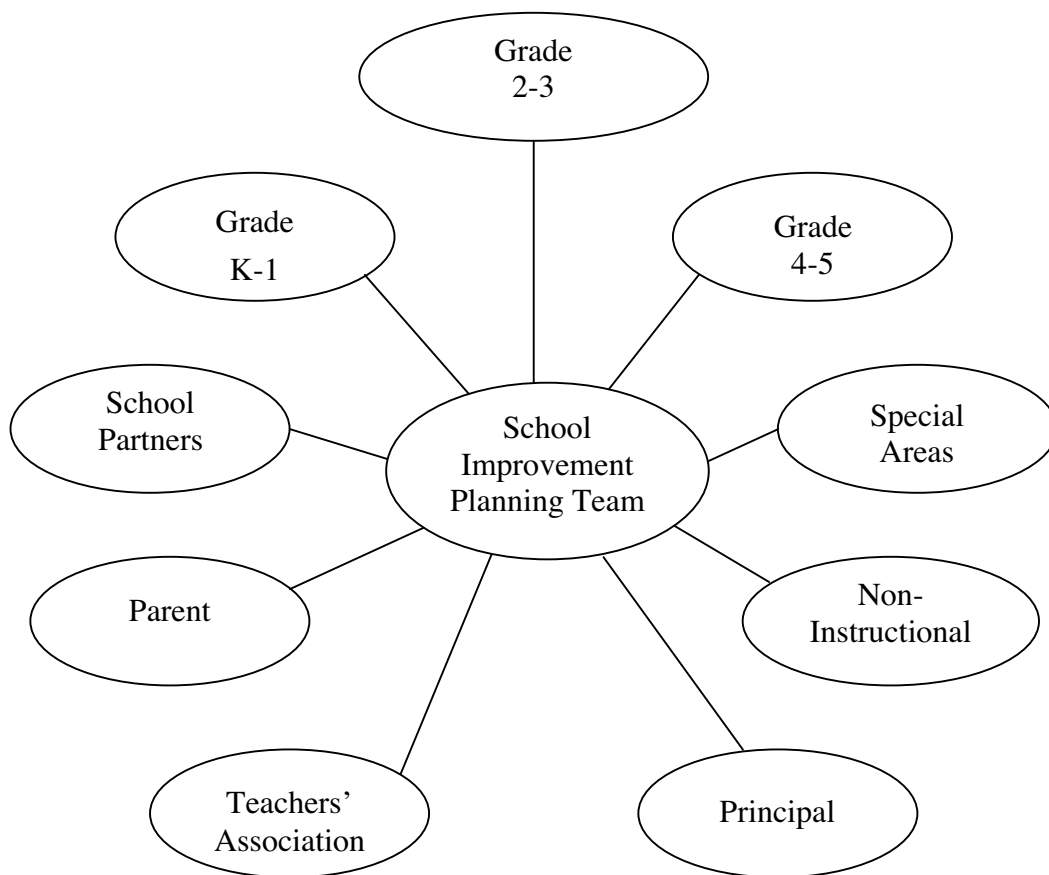
²The Guidebook differentiates between school improvement governance and school governance. School improvement governance refers only to decisions about the school improvement efforts whereas school governance includes other decisions.

accountability and decision-making and would be consistent with the type of management structure found in successful school improvement efforts. Combinations of the two are also possible.

Regardless of which governance model is selected, the school must be the focus for improvement—not the grade, group, or the functional role that "elected" the members of the school improvement team. Regardless of the constituency represented by the members of the school improvement team, focus must remain on decisions that are best for the school as a whole. The team exists to plan and manage school improvement. Its members must, at times, make decisions that may not be the best for one group, but are best for the school as a whole.

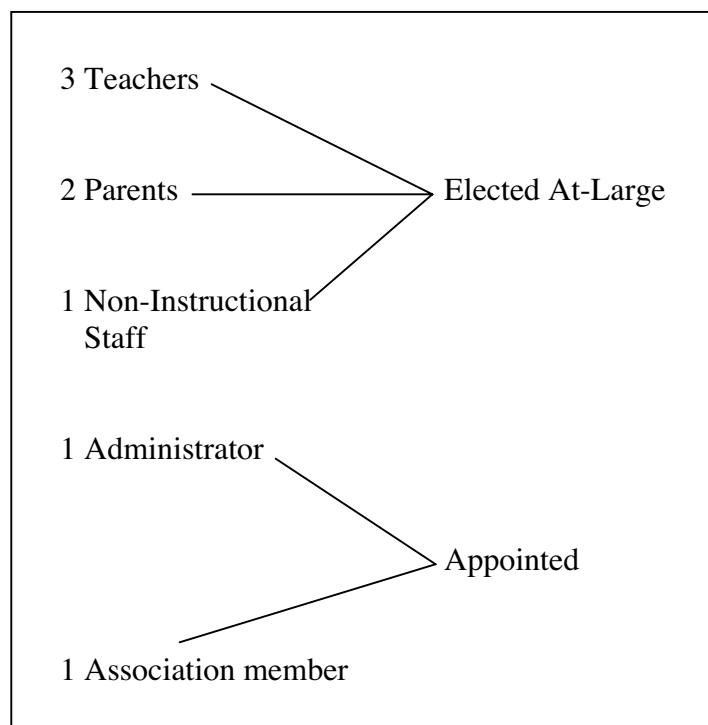
Representational models of governance have teams, such as site councils, elected by (or volunteers from) an identified constituency.

Figure 2. Representational Model of Governance



At-large models have teams elected (or volunteered) to represent the school without identification of a specific constituency.

Figure 3. At-Large Model of Governance



Both models, representative and at-large, should adhere to several key elements:

- Limit size to around eight members;
- Have teacher majority;
- Ensure principal is part of the team;
- Ensure parents/community that represent student subgroups are included;
- Ensure meetings are open to all members of the school community;
- Rotate chair or have the team chaired by a member other than the principal; and
- Establish procedures for meetings, including
 - developing an agenda and selecting appropriate meeting schedules,
 - defining roles,
 - establishing input and appeal procedures,
 - providing direct input through staff and committee meetings with all staff, as well as sharing written minutes, and
 - delineating clearly what the team decides and what it does not decide.

The new governance structure for school improvement should be used in both planning, implementation, and evaluation. The governance structure can play an important role in the comprehensive needs assessment and inquiry process. For example, teams of staff members can be assigned to collect and summarize data about different dimensions of the school profile or be assigned to research possible solutions as part of the inquiry process. During implementation, the same governance structure could be used to manage, monitor, and evaluate the school improvement plan.

School Improvement Decision-Making



Another essential foundation of school improvement is the process the school uses to make decisions about school improvement—such as what solutions are implemented or how best to refine the solutions. A team's decision-making procedure is partly determined by the school's governance structure.

The planning team must answer two key questions about school improvement decision-making:

1. Who will make the decisions for school improvement?
2. What is the method for making these decisions?

Who Decides?

The question of “who makes the decisions” is important because it can set the tone for school improvement. Many planning teams have assumed the responsibility for determining the decision-making process for school improvement, since they have been given the responsibility for developing the school improvement plan. In most cases, this is not a problem, especially when **all** staff have input into the selection of the planning team. However, planning teams that decide they are the decision-making body may need to take steps to guard against alienating staff before the school gets to the point of selecting solutions.

Many planning teams decide that all teachers will be involved in decision-making. These teams will want to plan a consistent way of distributing information to the whole staff and of collecting input back from the whole staff. Some suggestions are whole staff meetings, prep period or department meetings, memos or fact sheets, or a combination of a pre-meeting memo followed by a brief face-to-face meeting. This last suggestion is good for quick voting or limited discussion and brainstorming on a particular issue.

What is the Decision-Making Method?

The school has many options in selecting the decision-making method for school improvement. Some of the more common options for decision-making include consensus (see below), two-thirds majority, a simple majority, or even a combination of these depending on the importance of the decision. Some school reform models require that a certain percentage of instructional staff (e.g., 80 percent) must agree to implement the program before the program developers agree to work with a school. The degree of the staff's commitment to the program is critical for successful implementation.

The planning team (or school) may want to consider several other elements when selecting their decision-making method for school improvement.

Building Consensus.³ Consensus is an important vehicle for making decisions that will strongly affect the entire staff and school. However, many people confuse “consensus” with “unanimity.” Waiting for every person to support a proposal can in reality stymie the whole decision-making process. A more functional definition of consensus can be described as follows: We have reached consensus when all points of view have been heard, and the will of the group is evident - even to those who most oppose it.

One practical way of approaching consensus is by using a “Fist to Five” approach.

- Clarify the proposal before voting
- Vote using “Fist to Five” (Members hold up fingers according to their support of the proposal)
 - 5 – I’ll champion
 - 4 – Strongly agree
 - 3 – Agree
 - 2 – Reservations
 - 1 – Oppose
 - Fist – Veto
- Invite anyone showing fewer than 3 fingers to propose an amendment or express concerns
 - Acknowledge that some “cons” cannot be changed or minimized
 - Research may be needed by a faculty committee
- Suggest proposal or revised proposal for consensus

While building consensus, assume good intentions of the people in the group and focus on behavior, not attitude. Sometimes critical thinkers sound as though they have a negative attitude but are really only offering critical observations. Their behavior, in other words their actual support, may be on the positive side.

Use these four questions to check that you have maintained a solid consensus process:

- Did we build shared knowledge regarding best practice?
- Did we honestly assess our current reality (using data)?
- Did we ensure all points of view were heard?
- Was the will of the group evident even to those who opposed it?

Past History of the School. The school may already have an engrained and widely accepted decision-making process. Unless the decision-making process has constrained previous school improvement efforts, the school may decide to use the existing process.

The Kind of School Climate. The school might consider the school climate when selecting a decision-making method. Some school climates lend themselves to certain types of decision-making. A school where trust is an issue may opt for a consensus approach to decision-

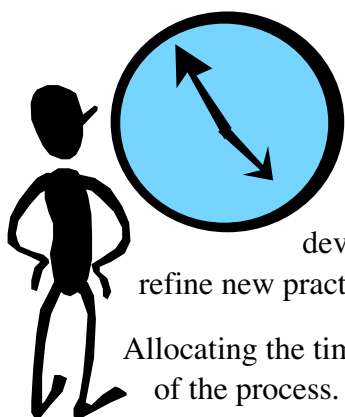
³ Adapted from Du Four, Richard, *Building Consensus and Responding to Resisters*, Professional Learning Communities Institutes: 2003. National Education Service.

making. A school where teachers are already of a like mind may find a two-thirds majority as an acceptable decision-making process.

The Kind of Task. The school or planning team may decide that different types of decisions require different levels of decision-making. For example, some decisions may need input from all school staff, such as which reading program and strategies will be adopted school wide. Other decisions may be best left to smaller groups, such as planning the type of activities that will support the school literacy program.

Amount of Time Available. The amount of time that the school has available may help determine the decision-making process. A consensus decision-making process typically takes more time to achieve than other options. If a school needs to select solutions within a short timeframe, such as those schools in mandated school improvement, the school may choose a less time-consuming approach to decision-making.

Teacher Collaboration: Establish a Regular Time for Planning, Implementation, Monitoring, and Professional Development



Experience and the research literature have shown that school improvement takes time—time to construct a clear picture of the school and to select appropriate solutions to fit the school context. Planning, of course, is only the first step in school improvement. Staff will also need time for professional development in order to focus on student achievement, to learn and refine new practices, and to reflect on these practices as they implement them.

Allocating the time to plan and implement school improvement is a critical element of the process. Most schools do not have the time already set aside in their school day that is needed to develop a school improvement plan, let alone the time needed for teachers to monitor and reflect about implementation of new instructional practices. As schools begin to develop their plans, the need for time specifically set aside for school improvement will become clear.

Teacher collaboration time does not have to be limited to SIP team activities. Permanently providing for teacher collaboration time is essential for continued school improvement so teachers can discuss student assessment, plan together, create common assessments, and support each other's professional development.

Successful school improvement efforts have been able to create the additional time needed for school improvement and teacher collaboration through several strategies. Planning teams can discuss these options as they determine the best way(s) for their school to find the time for school improvement and the ongoing collaboration required to support it. The most common types are weekly early release and late start days.

- *Early Release Days.* Many schools lengthen the school day by 10 to 15 minutes per day for four days during the week to allow for early release of students on the fifth day. This additional 40 to 60 minutes a week can then be allocated to teachers for planning and implementation.
- *Late Start Days.* A similar practice is for schools to lengthen the school day by 10 to 15 minutes per day for four days during the week to allow for late start of students on the fifth day.
- *Common Planning Periods.* Some schools design common planning times for “functional” groups of teachers (e.g., grade level teams), so they can meet for planning and implementation. Of course, all schedule changes must meet district guidelines. The following is a list of some possible ways of finding common planning periods:
 - At elementary schools, align “specials” such as physical education, music, and computer
 - Use floating substitutes to cover classes (elementary and secondary)

- Use district staff development days (elementary and secondary)
- Arrange schedules to accommodate common planning periods for certain groups
- Adjusted start/ending times (i.e., start earlier or end later one day a week)
- Bank time (i.e., Teach ten extra minutes for nine days in a row. This saves up 90 minutes to be used on the tenth day for collaboration.)

Whatever final solution is favored, planning teams will need to consult with the school district office as well as the school community before selecting the best option(s) for creating time for school improvement planning and implementation. Once implementation has begun, consideration must be given to assuring time for ongoing teacher collaboration in regard to professional development as well as monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the plan.

Encourage Team Building



Team building is the process of getting people motivated about change, not *making* people do things. People can get excited about change when they have a role in it. Teaming acts as a vehicle to help staff take ownership in the change process. When they work properly, teams are more productive than individuals. Indeed, research has shown that effective teams demonstrate better communication and greater staff involvement in problem solving and decision-making (Lezotte, 1992).

Team building plays an important role in the success of school improvement. School Improvement Planning teams need to deal with the internal task of team building as well as the school's external task of making improvements. But planning teams often underestimate the need to participate in teambuilding, both for themselves and for the entire staff. When a team runs smoothly, members can concentrate on the goal of improving student learning. In contrast, a team that fails to build relationships among its members will waste time on struggles for control.

Team building is important for SIP teams, subcommittees, and the school as a whole. Team building begins with planning and continues throughout implementation. The more teams learn to work effectively as a team, the better they will be at preventing many typical problems. School staff may want to review the following eight essential ingredients to team building when establishing their SIP teams (adapted from Scholtes, 1988).

1. Clear Team Goals

A team works best when everyone understands the team's overall purpose and goals. Ideally, the team should agree on its mission, see it as workable, or narrow the mission if it is not. They should also agree on larger project goals and have a vision about how they will proceed to achieve these goals. If there is confusion or disagreement over goals, successful teams work to resolve the issues.

More importantly, school staff should be involved in setting school improvement goals. The goals should be frequently reviewed by school staff as a way of communicating and refining them. The steps outlined in this Guidebook give staff and the school community important roles in establishing school improvement goals.

2. Broad Participation

Since every team member has a stake in the group's success, everyone should participate in discussions and decisions, share commitment to the project's success, and contribute his/her

talents. A good rule of thumb is that the more a person is involved in the implementation, the larger the role a person should play in determining what is implemented. Assure there is continued representation on the SIP team of students who are Special Education and Limited English Proficient, of parents, and of district office personnel.

3. Clearly Defined Roles

Teams operate most efficiently if they tap everyone's talents and all members understand their duties and know who is responsible for what issues and tasks. For school improvement, the school must decide how roles will be assigned (e.g., volunteering, designation by the principal or planning team). Clearly defined roles will facilitate program coordination during implementation.

4. Clear Communication

Effective problem solving depends upon how well information is shared among team members. Clear communication includes speaking with clarity and directness, being succinct and avoiding long anecdotes and examples, listening actively, exploring rather than debating, not interrupting when others are speaking, and having agreed-upon modes of communication, e.g., e-mail.

5. Effective Team Meetings

Teams should encourage all members to use the skills and practices that make discussions and meetings more effective. Some of these simple devices include: use agendas, have a facilitator, take minutes, avoid being called out of meetings, use effective discussion skills, draft the next agenda, and bring closure to meetings by using a few minutes to debrief before leaving. Having each team member give a short, uninterrupted description of his/her learning, "ah-has," or suggestions can be a positive way to evaluate the meeting and to be sure each member is heard.

6. Well-Defined Decision-Making Procedures

A team's decision-making process is a good indicator about how well the team functions. Ideally, the team should discuss how to make decisions, such as when to take a poll or when to decide by consensus (see Decision-Making). The team should explore important issues by getting input from every member, deciding issues by the agreed upon method, and using data as the basis for decisions. A team's decision-making procedure is partly determined by the school's governance structure.

7. Established Ground Rules

Effective teams establish ground rules or norms for what is and is not appropriate (e.g., attendance and promptness at meetings). Ideally, the team should have open discussions about ground rules to decide what behaviors are acceptable and unacceptable. These norms should be openly communicated.

8. Attention to Group Process

All team members should be aware of the group process—how the team works together. For example, team members should pay attention to the content of the meeting and take responsibility to comment or intervene to correct a group process problem.

A key test for any society is whether it is self-correcting. To be self-correcting, it must be open and truthful about itself.

David K. Shipler (1997). *The Working Poor: Invisible in America*

Manage the Change Process



School improvement, by its very nature, **is change**. School improvement is complex because change is complex. Schools and planning teams must take the necessary steps to prepare people for change to increase the chances the school improvement plan will be implemented successfully. One way of planning ahead for change is to remember the “Implementation Dip” (see Appendix G). No matter where a performance level is, change will almost always cause an initial decrease in that performance. However, persistence and the practice of new learning will, over time, result in a higher performance level than the starting point. The implementation dip of new learning is normal and should be expected and planned for in the timeline of change.

There is a good deal of research about education change. While there are no silver bullets, research has identified valuable lessons about change.

To help schools plan for and implement school change, Michael Fullan identified ten *assumptions about change* and a set of *factors affecting implementation*.

Assumptions About Change

The assumptions the planning team makes about change are extremely important in determining whether the realities of implementation get confronted or ignored. School improvement planning teams may want to review and reflect about these assumptions on change to see if they are in a good position to confront the realities of implementation.

1. **Do not assume** that the planning team’s version of what the change should be is the one that staff should or could implement. Instead, assume that one of the main purposes of the process of implementation is to change the planning team’s reality of what should be through interaction with the staff who implement the changes.
2. **Assume** that any important innovation, if it is to result in change, requires staff to work out their own meaning. Important change involves a certain amount of ambiguity, ambivalence, and uncertainty for individual staff about the meaning of the change. Effective implementation is a *process of clarification*.
3. **Assume** that conflict and disagreement are inevitable and fundamental to successful change. Since any group of people possesses multiple realities, any collective change attempt will necessarily involve conflict.
4. **Assume** that staff need pressure to change (even in directions which they desire). Change will only be effective, however, under conditions which allow staff to react, form their own position, interact with other staff, obtain technical assistance and support, etc.

5. **Assume** that effective change takes time. Unrealistic or undefined timelines fail to recognize that implementation occurs developmentally. Teams should expect meaningful change to take a minimum of two or three years.
6. **Do not assume** the reason for the lack of implementation is that staff reject the underlying values of the change, or simply resist all change. Rather, assume staff have a number of possible reasons: value rejection, inadequate resources to support implementation, insufficient time elapsed.
7. **Do not expect** all or even most staff to change. The complexity of change suggests it is impossible to bring about widespread restructuring in any large social system. Progress occurs in steps (e.g., by following the assumptions listed here) that *increase* the number of staff affected. The planning team should be encouraged by what has been accomplished by way of improvement rather than be discouraged by all that remains to be done.
8. **Assume** that the planning team needs a *plan* which is based on the above assumptions and which addresses the factors known to affect implementation (see the section below). Knowledge of the change process is essential. Careful planning can bring about significant change on a fairly wide scale over two or three years.
9. **Assume** that no amount of knowledge will ever clearly identify what should be implemented. Planning teams make decisions on a combination of knowledge, political considerations, on-the-spot decisions, and intuition. By learning more about the change process, the planning team will improve the mix of resources on which they draw to make decisions.
10. **Assume** that change is a frustrating, discouraging business. If all or some of the above assumptions cannot be made, planning teams should not expect significant change *as far as implementation is concerned*. (Fullan, 1991. *The New Meaning of Educational Change*.)

Factors Affecting Implementation—Guidelines for Action

Planning teams can take steps to guide staff through the process of change and possibly improve the success of school improvement efforts. Fullan identified the factors that have the most influence on affecting the implementation of change. Planning teams may want to review these factors affecting implementation, incorporating them into their own plans, as one way to help staff implement changes under school improvement.

*Change is a journey
into uncharted waters
in a leaky boat with a
mutinous crew.*

~ Michael Fullan

Clearly Identify the Need for the Change. The planning team should emphasize the need for the change. All staff should recognize and understand these needs as well as understand how the proposed change works to address those needs. Without such understanding, the implementation of change is often ineffective.

Clarify the Key Elements of the Change. When implementing change, all school staff need to clearly understand what the change is, how their practices are affected by it, and how the school will look different. It is not enough for all staff to buy in; staff must also truly understand what the change will look like and their role in it. Staff should be able to identify the essential features of the innovation or change they are implementing.

Determine the Complexity of the Change. Every change has a different level of complexity in terms of skills, alterations in beliefs, and use of materials required of school staff. The planning team should analyze the change in terms of complexity. While complex change can create problems for implementation, it may result in meaningful, long-term impact—which is the purpose of school improvement. Simple changes, on the other hand, may be easier to carry out, but often fail to make a big difference. If complex changes are implemented, it is important to define specific components of the change and create a schedule for incremental implementation, such as in a master action plan, to maximize the clarity of the change required.

Determine the Quality and Practicality of Program Materials, Technologies, Products. The adoption of new materials should not be taken lightly. When adopting new materials, the planning team should consider how the materials would be implemented. Do the materials come with an orientation or in-service training? Do the materials include instructional methods to help teachers implement the curriculum? Without such provisions, even the “most effective” curriculum can go unused or be ineffective because teachers either do not have the time to figure out how to implement it, or they lack the expertise to implement it correctly.

Research the History of Innovative Attempts. Educational change has been wrought with failure, frustration, and negative experiences. If staff have had continued failure in their attempts to implement change, it is likely that their attitude towards future attempts will be less than zealous and optimistic. As a result, it is important to research and understand past attempts at change to better support staff in their approach to the current change.

Conduct a Thorough and Thoughtful Adoption Process. While it is important that representatives of those who will implement a change be part of the decision-making and planning processes, more important is the quality of the planning processes. The planning process must produce more than a series of frustrating meetings resulting in the mere adoption of a program. Instead the process must be carried out with careful consideration of the requirements of the implementation and produce a plan for implementation from the staff who will implement it.

Support Teacher Change with Administrative Involvement. In order for change proposed by central administrators to be implemented, administrators must do more than just declare it. For teachers to take change seriously, district administrators must demonstrate with their actions that they are serious about change. The success of implementation is dependent on a central, unified focus and a demonstration on district administrators' parts that they understand and will actively manage the factors and processes that affect implementation.

Provide Quality Staff Development with Ongoing Support During Implementation. The amount of training is not necessarily related to the quality of implementation. Training must be designed to provide ongoing, interactive, cumulative learning to facilitate the development of new concepts, skills, and behavior. Teachers need training during implementation to help them with the early stages of implementation and the problems that come with it [as well as ongoing follow-up and support from administrators and colleagues]. Without this opportunity to learn while doing, teachers will not understand the basis of the theory, may only be able to use materials mechanically, or will give up on continuing the use of good strategies.

Create a Realistic Timeline and Establish Evaluation Procedures to Guide Implementation. It is extremely important to develop an implementation timeline that is neither unrealistically short nor casually long. The major reason is that the decision-makers who create the timeline often have an adoption time perspective while staff have an implementation time perspective. Unrealistic timelines add to the burdens of implementation: materials fail to arrive on schedule, orientation and training are neglected or carried out perfunctorily, communication is hurried and frequently overlooked, people become overloaded, and continued support is forgotten.

Another major dilemma is to decide what data to collect, when to collect it, and how best to use it for evaluation. When planning the evaluation, the planning team should consider the research which has shown that monitoring implementation is effective in facilitating change if it is linked to a plan for acting on the data collected. Research has also shown that school and classroom level information, such as information about student learning and other implementation problems, is strongly related to school improvement.

Ensure Principal Support. The support of principals in school improvement efforts positively affects the likelihood of success. Principal support serves to legitimize the seriousness of the change and to provide psychological and resource support for teachers. Attendance at workshops is one of the best ways principals can show their support of a proposed change. Their attendance at these workshops and other meetings [not only] helps the principal more fully understand the teacher's perspective and struggles in the change process [but also builds schema for what the principal should look for during observations].

Provide for Teacher-Teacher Interactions. Change requires resocialization and interaction is the primary source of social training. Thus, the interaction between and among teachers is very important throughout the change process. They need to draw strength from other teachers, to exchange ideas with them, and receive positive feelings about their work.

Understand the Teacher Characteristics that Support Positive Change. Level of education and years of experience do not necessarily contribute to a teacher's success with change. Rather there are several teacher characteristics that support change, including a teacher's previous participation in and success with change, a teacher's belief that all children can succeed, a school-wide emphasis and expectation that teachers can improve student learning, and a teacher's belief in furthering his/her education through talking about the practice of teaching, observing other teachers, planning, designing, researching, evaluating, and preparing materials with other teachers and administrators.

Another guiding resource to support the change process is reflected in the work of Gene Hall and Shirley Hord. In their book *Implementing Change: Patterns, Principles, and Potholes* (2001), Hall and Hord provide many tools and techniques for change facilitators that take into account the stages of concern of the individuals and institutions dealing with change, as well as examining the role of leadership in times of change and the different styles of change facilitators that can produce varying results in implementation.

Communicate about School Improvement



Communication plays a pivotal role in school improvement efforts—especially in its relationship with the other five essential foundations of school improvement. Open and frequent communication encourages team building, helps prepare people for change, and informs staff and the school community about the school improvement effort, its implementation, and individual roles in the effort.

Teachers, parents, students, and community members need to have information about the school's improvement efforts. They should be involved in every step in the planning and the implementation of the improvement plan. The following discussion highlights what the planning team needs to communicate about school improvement during the four planning steps.

Comprehensive Needs Assessment. The entire school community should be given the opportunity to provide input into and participate in the needs assessment. Based on the needs assessment, the planning team should develop a school profile to obtain a complete picture of the school. The planning team should also communicate the results of the needs assessment to the whole school community so that the school community has the opportunity to review the results and help interpret them.

Inquiry Process. The planning team should involve all of the school community in reviewing the priority needs, the causes, and the goals and give input about them before solutions are determined for implementation. The planning team should communicate the results of the inquiry process, i.e., the selected goals and solutions, to the entire school community.

Master Plan Design. The master plan developed in this step of school improvement should effectively reflect what, when, and how school improvement activities will be implemented. The master plan should also identify the roles of all teachers in the improvement efforts. Finally, the completed master plan should be shared with the entire school community.

Implementation and Evaluation. Both teachers and students should know the goals of the improvement plan. Communication among teachers about the progress of the plan and evaluation of student learning in relation to the implementation of the plan should be consistent and ongoing. School improvement goals should also be communicated to the school community.

Methods to Communicate to Staff and the School Community

The planning team has a range of options to communicate information about the school improvement effort.

- **Newsletters.** Since many schools have monthly newsletters, the planning team could devote a section of the newsletter to the progress of school improvement planning, implementation, and attaining improvement goals.
- **Planning Team Meetings.** Hold open meetings for all planning team activities, including subcommittees that are assigned specific responsibilities.
- **Department or Prep Period Meetings.** These smaller meetings not only provide a chance for more open discussion, but also support teacher collaboration.
- **Minutes.** Create and distribute minutes of all planning team meetings and subcommittee meetings.
- **Internet.** Use the Internet to communicate information about school improvement efforts, such as the school newsletter, minutes of meetings, and progress on improvement goals.
- **Display Goals.** After the school improvement plan is complete, enlist staff and students in posting school goals at key points around the school, such as the school entrance, faculty room, and main office.
- **Distribute School Improvement Plan.** After the school improvement plan is complete, first make sure to distribute the plan to all staff members and review it together. Next, make copies of the plan available to the school community in the school office and distribute a copy of the plan to parent advisory groups.

PART II: Planning School Improvement – Overview

Four Steps to School Improvement

1. Comprehensive Needs Assessment
2. Inquiry Process
3. Master Plan Design
4. Implementation and Evaluation

The materials in SAGE are designed to assist planning teams in a data driven, school improvement planning process. Individual schools will be apprised of their obligations to meet various compliance deadlines for their new or revised school improvement plans. Although the steps in the planning process are presented sequentially, they overlap in practice. The planning process is best thought of as a cycle of overlapping phases rather than discrete steps.

In most cases, a planning team starts by conducting a **comprehensive needs assessment**, which is an analysis of data on the entire school, paying particular attention to the needs of the educationally disadvantaged. The planning team will use guiding questions to discuss the collected student achievement data and will then develop 1 or 2 student achievement goals based on the analysis of that data. Next, the team will examine other data collected around five dimensions of school success and, using data analysis guide questions, will create a school profile by identifying strengths and concerns within the data. The next step is to consider what may have been the causes, based on the data, for the identified concerns as related to the chosen academic goal(s). The planning team also revisits the school's mission and beliefs and, if necessary, establishes a collaborative process for the development or renewal of them. This part of the process absorbs approximately 60% of the SIP team's time and effort.

In the second phase, the **inquiry process**, the team researches possible causes that led to the concerns identified in the needs assessment. After verifying these possible causes, the planning team contacts and reviews as many information sources as feasible to find the most appropriate solution(s). Potential sources include the Nevada School Support Team, Regional Professional Development Programs, technical assistance centers, educational labs, research literature, schools, books, and online services. Each potential solution must be linked to the identified causes of the priority needs. Before making a final selection, potential solutions must be carefully reviewed and agreed upon by the entire staff. A list of internet resources and other references can be found in Part III of this guidebook.

The third phase, **master plan design**, is the “nuts and bolts” phase. During this phase, the planning team builds action plans to implement the solution(s) identified in the inquiry process and refines the goal(s) to create clear, measurable objectives. The planning team should also determine how support programs at the school, such as Migrant Education and Special Education, fit into the improvement plan so that all programs, activities, and budgets are working together to support the improvement efforts. The goal(s) should align with the school's mission and beliefs in support of the school's vision. In addition, the SIP team will create a plan to monitor the completion of master plan action steps, to assess the level of implementation, as well as to evaluate the progress and success of the master school improvement plan.

In the fourth phase, **implementation and evaluation**, the planning team monitors the implementation of the improvement plan, focusing on how well teachers implement new instructional strategies and programs and the resulting impact on student learning. The team follows procedures for collecting data, assessing master plan progress, and evaluating student achievement. The team also addresses how the master plan will be implemented and supported on a daily basis.

The school improvement process does not end with evaluation. The process is ongoing. Once the initial plan has been developed and implemented, the four steps are repeated and become part of a ***continuous improvement cycle*** in which the school regularly considers data and monitors and revises the improvement plan.

Appendix E contains an evaluation rubric schools can use to evaluate the four planning steps and six essential foundations of school improvement.

In the section labeled “Additional Information” found in this guidebook is a blueprint for the process schools will use to revise their plans if they are in second year improvement or beyond.

Also found in the “Additional Information” section is a crosswalk between SAGE and Northwest Accreditation. At the end of each SAGE step suggestions are provided regarding additional considerations for Northwest Accreditation procedures.

Step One — Comprehensive Needs Assessment (Resulting in a School Profile)

Comprehensive Needs Assessment

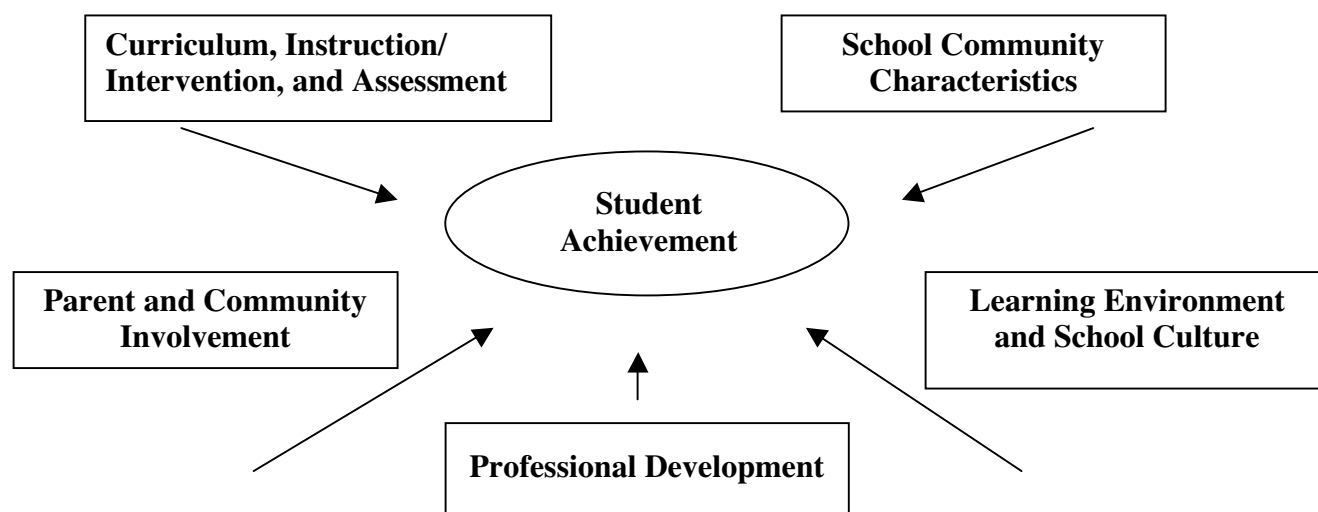
- Collect Data
- Organize Data
- Analyze the Student Achievement Results and Develop Student Achievement Goals
- Analyze Data from the Five Dimensions of School Success and Identify Strengths, Concerns, and Underlying Reasons for the Goals

The first step in the school improvement process is to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment — a systematic process of gathering data about the school to create a school profile and develop goals for student achievement. The term “needs assessment” does not mean that the school should look only for concerns or weaknesses. A more appropriate term, perhaps, might be conducting an “inventory” of the school in which both strengths and concerns are documented in the school profile, which is in the school improvement plan template.

A needs assessment is based on the premise that a school must have a clear picture of its current status, or “what is,” before effective changes can be made. To create this picture, the school gathers data on student achievement and five key dimensions crucial to understanding and promoting school success. The dimension of school community

characteristics includes demographic data about all stakeholders in the school and community. The other dimensions promoting school success are curriculum, instruction, assessment, and intervention; learning environment and school culture; parent and community involvement; and professional development. When conducting the needs assessment, the planning team should gather data from state, district, school, and classroom assessment, as well as information from staff, parents, students, and community members, to ensure they obtain a complete picture of the school as seen by all stakeholders. This first step takes approximately 60% of the time and effort focused on the school improvement planning process.

The focus of school improvement must be student achievement. Plans will be based on goals derived from examining student achievement and other assessment data. Data from the five dimensions of school success will then be analyzed to provide teams with more information about how the school will approach the changes that will need to occur at the school to support the school improvement goal(s). The following graphic page refers to how each dimension supports student learning.

Figure 4. Five Dimensions of School Success that Support Student Achievement

It is important to conduct a thorough needs assessment because this activity lays a foundation for the steps that follow. Since the steps of school improvement are cyclical and the process ongoing, careful analysis of the needs assessment will save time and energy later in the process.

The table below indicates which sources for data collection are best used in each dimension to give the most accurate information about that dimension.

Table 1. Sources and Tools for Collecting Data in Student Achievement and the Five Dimensions of School Success

Dimension → Data Tool ↓	Student Achievement	School Community Characteristics	Curriculum, Instruction/ Intervention, & Assessment	Learning Environment and School Culture	Parent and Community Involvement	Professional Development
Student Assessments	X		X			X
Demographic Data	X	X	X	X	X	X
Observations			X	X		X
Surveys			X	X	X	X
Interviews			X	X	X	X
Focus Groups			X	X	X	X

The use of external facilitators is strongly recommended for conducting observations, surveys, and interviews because they provide an element of confidentiality and can lessen the workload of the planning team.

In Nevada, an important source of information for the needs assessment is the School Accountability Report that districts and schools are required to submit annually to parents and to the Nevada Department of Education. NRS 385, in fact, requires schools to examine their accountability report. The report contains information about student learning and school community characteristics, as well as information on the other four dimensions of school success (visit: www.nevadareportcard.com).

All of the data collection should be done simultaneously to collect as much relevant information in as timely a manner as possible.

Description of Data Sources

Before beginning data collection, it might be helpful to look over the following discussion of data resources, tools, approaches, and examples.

Student Assessments. Several forms of assessments are being used to measure student learning of content standards. The state employs large-scale criterion-referenced tests in reading, writing, math, and science in multiple grades to evaluate the extent to which schools and school districts are meeting state expectations for student proficiency. Norm-referenced assessments are also used to compare school, school district, and state performance to normed national performance. School districts are using an array of assessments to monitor the success of local programming and student progress. Teachers are using multiple forms of assessment on a daily basis to evaluate the extent to which students are learning the material being presented and to modify instructional strategies in order to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all students. Included in Appendix A: Comprehensive Needs Assessment is a chart of State Assessments for reference. This chart explains the different student proficiency tests administered by the state, what their purpose is, and whether they are used for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The subsequent charts are blank and can be used to help organize data from state, district, and school assessments. Current results (as well as specific previous years) of state tests can be found through the district office or online through the Department of Education. The results of district assessments can be found through contacting the district test coordinator. Other data collection charts for your convenience can be found on the Nevada school improvement website: www.nevadasage.org.

Nevada legislation of 2001 requires schools to —

Include separate measurable annual objectives for continuous and substantial improvement for each of the following:

- Economically disadvantaged students,
- Students from major racial and ethnic groups,
- Students with disabilities, and
- Students with limited English proficiency

To access state test results on the web through the Nevada Department of Education, go to www.nevadareportcard.com. AYP charts are available at the Nevada Report Card site, as well

as the AYP site (www.doe.nv.gov/nclb/ayp/). AYP information can be viewed in HTML or saved in Excel.

Demographics

In order to make careful decisions about school improvement planning, it is crucial to understand the background of the school community as it exists and to take a look at recent trends or possible changes over the previous two or three years. This demographic information provides a picture of the students and community that the school improvement plan will address. Demographic information can be collected at the school site, through the district office, or via survey and focus group results. Data content includes student demographic data, student behavior data, staff demographic data, school characteristic data, and community demographic data. Noticing changes over time in school community characteristics allows schools to teach the students and address the needs they currently have as opposed to what they used to have.

Classroom Observations

Purpose: To gather information about instructional strategies and levels of student engagement, among other forms of best practice, in order to make informed decisions regarding professional development planning.

Strengths: To provide fairly concrete evidence of the use of effective instructional strategies and the levels of student engagement in the classroom. Observation is more objective than self-reporting and other subjective measures because it can be based on a protocol or criteria.

Weaknesses: Time consuming, observers must be trained, can be expensive for the school.

Example in school improvement: Typically, classroom observations include information about instructional practices; student engagement; levels of cognition; standards, curriculum, and students; assessment; and learning environment. See Appendix A: Comprehensive Needs Assessment Worksheets for an example of a whole school classroom observation report.

Much research has been done in the area of effective instruction. In order to collect meaningful observation data that is useful for school improvement, good classroom observation should be based on this research. General areas in which to collect information on instruction are:

- instructional practices to engage and support all students in learning;
- student engagement;
- level of cognition;
- instructional practices related to standards, curriculum, and students;
- assessing student learning; and
- creating and maintaining effective learning environments for student learning.

For more information about the important topic of effective instruction, see *What Works in Schools: Translating Research into Action* by Robert J. Marzano (2003).

Many schools in Nevada have used a classroom observation method that is carried out by a team of outside observers in order to ensure confidentiality and impartiality. With this protocol, all teachers and classrooms are visited by trained observers who collect information about teaching and student engagement in the school, based on an objective set of criteria. These observations are never to be used for individual personnel evaluation. The SIP team can arrange this type of observation through the school district, the Nevada Department of Education, the Regional Professional Development Program, WestEd Regional Educational Laboratory, or the external facilitator hired by the school. The results of these observations are compiled by the outside facilitator and presented to the SIP team and the staff. Individual results are never reported or returned to the school, and the observations are in no way intended to serve as a tool for personnel evaluation. The observation forms are destroyed as soon as the results are compiled as the purpose is to present a composite of the school, not to focus on individuals. This information is very powerful in terms of relating teaching to student learning and determining professional development needs.

Surveys

Purpose: To collect information from a large number of stakeholders about school and classroom practices.

Strengths: Allows the collection of a lot of information in a short amount of time. Easy to administer, easy to summarize.

Weaknesses: Based on perception which can be subjective and not in close alignment with more concrete evidence.

Example in school improvement: Typically, comprehensive needs assessment includes surveys of teachers, students, and parents. Examples of blank surveys can be found in Appendix F. An example of a report out of survey results is in Appendix A: Comprehensive Needs Assessment Worksheets.

In Appendix F you will find a variety of surveys, developed by educational researchers, including teacher, parent, and student surveys (for both elementary and secondary level). Determine whether surveys should be translated according to school and community needs. Commercial surveys may also be purchased or schools can create surveys for themselves, if they have someone with training in this area. This is not encouraged, however, due to the length of time it takes to develop and validate survey instruments. Surveys can be used to collect information about the perceptions various groups may have about certain aspects of the school. This information is often useful in determining if a school's perception of itself matches with the actual student achievement data and the data collected during classroom observations.

In using the surveys, consideration should be given as to how they will be distributed and to whom, how they will be collected, how results will be compiled, and how results will be

presented to the staff. Be careful to collect either a random sampling of surveys from different attendance areas, subject areas, grade levels, etc., or conduct a complete survey of everyone, as in the case of a very small school staff. As with classroom observations, survey results are confidential and should be presented as a representative picture only. Survey results should be compiled and presented by an outside facilitator in order to ensure confidentiality. Staff and student surveys should have a 100% return, if the school is not ensuring a random sample, since staff and students are more or less a captive audience. Parent surveys should have a minimum return of 40%, in order to ensure reliability of results.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Purpose: To gather in-depth information about classroom and school practices.

Strengths: Allows the researcher to go into depth about a particular topic.

Weaknesses: Both interviews and focus groups can be time consuming and somewhat subjective. Interviews can sometimes be done with the wrong people. Focus groups can sometimes be dominated by strong personalities or people with hidden agendas.

Example in school improvement: Typically, interviews and focus groups are conducted by the outside facilitator and are based on questions developed to go deeper into a particular topic as suggested by surveys or other data. Examples of interview and focus group questions and protocol can be found in Appendix F.

Sometimes surveys may not provide a complete explanation of perceptions indicated by the responses. Interviews with individuals representing different viewpoints can clarify generalities suggested by survey results. Focus groups are another way for several people at a time to present in-depth clarification of certain issues, in addition to being an effective way to meet with parents who do not speak English. A focus group generally includes 10-12 people who are interested in or have background in a particular issue. Interviews and focus groups can be organized and managed by an external facilitator, if desired, who keeps the replies confidential and compiles results into a logical presentation for the school.

Other Supporting Data

Depending on the needs of the school, other supporting data and information that exist can be researched and presented to the SIP team and/or the whole staff. This information could include accountability reports, grant application and implementation statistics, school level fiscal information, schedules, etc.

The Steps of Comprehensive Needs Assessment

The steps provide planning teams with a guide for conducting the needs assessment that results in the school profile and one or two student achievement goals. In Appendix A, the Guidebook includes the Data Analysis Guide and a set of Needs Assessment Worksheets to help teams work through the steps. The numbers on the Needs Assessment Worksheets correspond to the steps in the needs assessment process.

1. Collect Data

How does the SIP team know what data to collect?

Begin by using the Data Analysis Guide (DAG). Since schools in need of improvement only have 90 days in which to develop or revise their school improvement plan, the Data Analysis Guide (Appendix A) included in this guidebook was created to help guide schools in the collection and discussion of data. The Data Analysis Guide is a bank of questions created to guide discussion around the most important aspects of achievement and each of the five dimensions of school success that support it. Many of the questions are based on what is known about best practice in education. The questions are meant to lead the collection, discussion, and analysis of data in student achievement and in each of the dimensions. Data collection sources are included in the guide to indicate where data on a particular subject might be found.

The Data Analysis Guide (DAG) is NOT a survey! The questions must be answered based on the analysis of data. The Data Analysis Guide is used as a tool to help SIP teams decide what data they already have and what needs to be collected. The guide is divided into six sections: Student Achievement and the five dimensions of school success (School Community Characteristics; Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention; Learning Environment and School Culture; Parent and Community Involvement; and Professional Development). Each section contains tables with three columns of questions, data sources, and a place to record who will be responsible for the data collection.

Skim the questions under Student Achievement and in each dimension. If data exist to answer the question, make sure the data are accessible to the SIP team. If data do not exist to answer the question, then the missing data must be collected. For example, in Student Achievement, question number 4 reads, “What do multi-year trends in the various assessments show about student achievement – by whole school and subgroups; by subjects, strands, and abilities?” If the school does not have previous years of data available, it should collect that information from the district office.

The questions are the basis for discussing and analyzing results after the data have been collected. Schools are encouraged to add or expand on the areas explored in the different dimensions, according to each school’s individual situation. Discuss the questions in depth; the answer to every question must be supported by data.

2. Organize Data

Once the data are collected, the planning team must organize the data, where possible, in a format that will help staff interpret the results, such as tables, charts, or graphs, (examples are provided in Appendix A: Needs Assessment Worksheets – Step 2). For example, the results from statewide tests can be displayed in bar charts to communicate student performance on the state’s four achievement levels (developing/emergent, approaches standard, meets standard, and exceeds standard). The Nevada Department of Education provides school data for every site in the state via the website: www.doe.nv.gov.

Information gathered from observations, surveys, interviews, and focus groups should be organized and summarized to present to the entire staff (examples of protocols are provided in Appendix F: Surveys, Focus Groups, and Interviews). This information can be presented as percentages, lists, narratives, charts, or diagrams. External facilitators can be an asset in collecting, analyzing, and presenting this information from an outside observer's viewpoint.

3. Analyze the Student Achievement Results and Develop Student Achievement Goals

To analyze the results of the data collection, planning teams will again use the framework of the Data Analysis Guide (Appendix A) and will begin by analyzing the student achievement data. Schools are required to disaggregate the data into relevant subgroups. For a discussion of data disaggregation, see the section at the end of this step.

Using the data collected, discuss and answer each question in the section titled Student Achievement and Goal Setting in the Data Analysis Guide. Keep track of the strengths and concerns in student achievement that emerge from the discussion on the worksheet that follows the questions. The SIP team can work on the questions all together or divide into question groups and report back to each other. Make sure each answer is based on data.

Once the primary concerns about student achievement have been agreed upon, the team must prioritize them. The team will establish one or two goals linked directly to the prioritized concerns. A goal is the overall plan or big picture outcome for a content area. The goals should be focused on student achievement. Three student achievement goal statements might be—

- All “___ Middle School” students, particularly our students on IEPs, will improve their math skills.
- All “___ Elementary School” students will increase their skills in reading comprehension, especially our LEP students.
- All “___ High School” students will increase their writing skills in all content areas, especially our male students.

These goals will give the planning team the direction it needs to identify strengths and concerns from the five dimensions of school success. The goals, however, will be revised and refined later in the process to arrive at the final measurable objectives.

Disaggregating Data for the Comprehensive Needs Assessment.

In order to meet both federal and state requirements, school districts and schools are required to disaggregate and analyze student achievement data. The primary purpose of disaggregating data is accountability—to identify the progress of various subgroups of students.

Disaggregating data, however, also plays an important role in needs assessment by helping schools more accurately identify strengths and weaknesses. For example, disaggregated data on local assessments can reveal situations in which an instructional program seems to be working very well for one subpopulation of students but perhaps not so well for another

subpopulation. Disaggregating data will help schools identify these possible differences. In addition, disaggregating data from sources other than assessments, such as observations or surveys, can give schools added insight into certain situations within a school. For example, by disaggregating information from parent surveys, one school discovered that their Hispanic parents were not feeling included at the school.

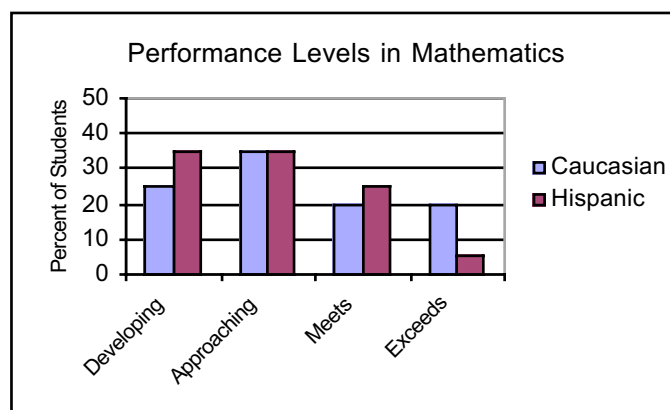
Under federal and state legislative mandates, local education agencies and schools are disaggregating data by —

- economic level,
- major ethnic and racial groups,
- students with disabilities,
- students with limited English proficiency (LEP),
- gender, and
- migrant status.

Schools are not required to report disaggregated data for subgroups falling below the minimum reporting number. In Nevada, the minimum number of students in a subpopulation group used for determining AYP is 25 for proficiency and 20 for participation. If there are fewer than 20 students in a group, the participation number becomes $n-1$. In order for students to be included in the minimum reporting number for AYP analysis, they must have been enrolled in the school for a full academic year. For Accountability purposes, the minimum n -size for reporting is 10. Though the number of students in a subgroup may be too low to be officially reported, **schools must still remember to take every individual student into consideration when creating a school improvement plan.**

Consider a hypothetical elementary school. Overall, the staff found through examining its CRT results that a larger percentage of students were below proficient levels in mathematics than in reading. Specifically, they found that approximately 65 percent of students were below proficient levels in mathematics. When school staff disaggregated the data by ethnicity and income, they found a larger percentage of Hispanic students were below proficiency than Caucasian students. It is also important to note the small percentage of Hispanic students in the Exceeds performance level. In addition, they learned that a larger percentage of low-income students were below proficient than students who were not low-income.

Figure 5. CRT Scores Disaggregated by Ethnicity



The new information that school staff obtained by disaggregating their CRT scores by ethnicity and income allowed them to more precisely identify an area of concern in order to develop a more accurate goal. The goal statement reads, “All of our students, especially Hispanic students and low-income students, will improve their mathematics skills substantially.” The refined goal statement helped the school identify solutions that would improve mathematics achievement for all students, but especially address the needs of

Hispanic and low-income students. Data disaggregation is a valuable tool for looking at the performance of subgroups in any school and is required for state level tests under NRS 385.

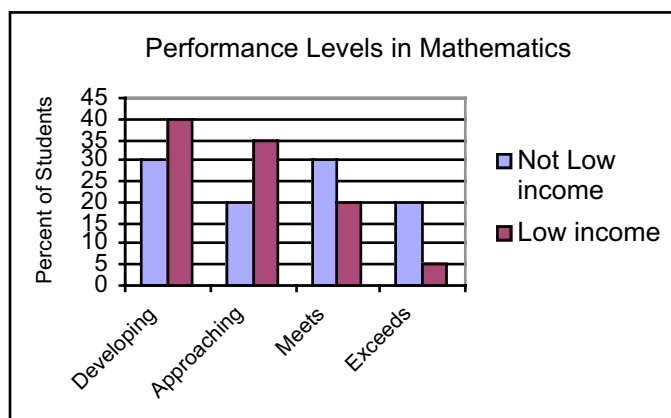
For more information about the important topic of disaggregating data, see *Analyzing, Disaggregating, Reporting, and Interpreting Students’ Achievement Test Results: A Guide to Practice for Title I and Beyond* by Richard Jaeger and Charlene Tucker, 1998, and Nevada’s Accountability Workbook, available through the Nevada Department of Education.

4. Analyze Data from the Five Dimensions of School Success to Identify Strengths, Concerns, and Underlying Reasons for the Goal(s)

The fourth step in the needs assessment process is to interpret the data for the five dimensions of school success in order to discover strengths and concerns in each dimension and to identify the causes of the concerns, based on data and the identified goal(s). This is not to say that areas of concern other than student achievement will be ignored. Concerns that do not directly focus on student learning, but indirectly affect it, such as problems with facilities, can be addressed as an organizational or supporting goal, or be addressed as an action step during Master Plan Design to support a student achievement goal.

Using the data already collected, discuss and answer each question in each of the five dimensions of school success in the Data Analysis Guide (school community demographics; curriculum, instruction, assessment, and intervention; learning environment and school culture; parent and community involvement; and professional development). As during the earlier discussion of student achievement, keep track of strengths and concerns on the worksheet that follows the questions in each dimension. Only record a success or a concern if it is based on data and if it is directly related to the identified goal or goals; in other words, if it impacts student learning. The concerns ultimately will help the SIP team identify the underlying reasons for the Student Achievement goal(s). During the analysis of data from the five dimensions, data may be collected on the same topic from several sources, which can then be triangulated. For a discussion of data triangulation, see the section at the end of this step called **Data Analysis Hints**.

Figure 6. CRT Scores Disaggregated by Income



From the concerns, select those that appear to be the underlying causes or reasons for the identified student achievement goal or goals. For example, if the goal is to increase skills in math and a concern is that students are not doing well in problem solving in math, an underlying cause might be that students' English skills are not strong enough to understand the problems in math. Be sure the concerns are based on data and that they are concerns the school can actually address and over which the school has control. Record these identified causes on the worksheet that follows the dimension questions. They will be used in the next step of the process, Inquiry.

Data Analysis Hints

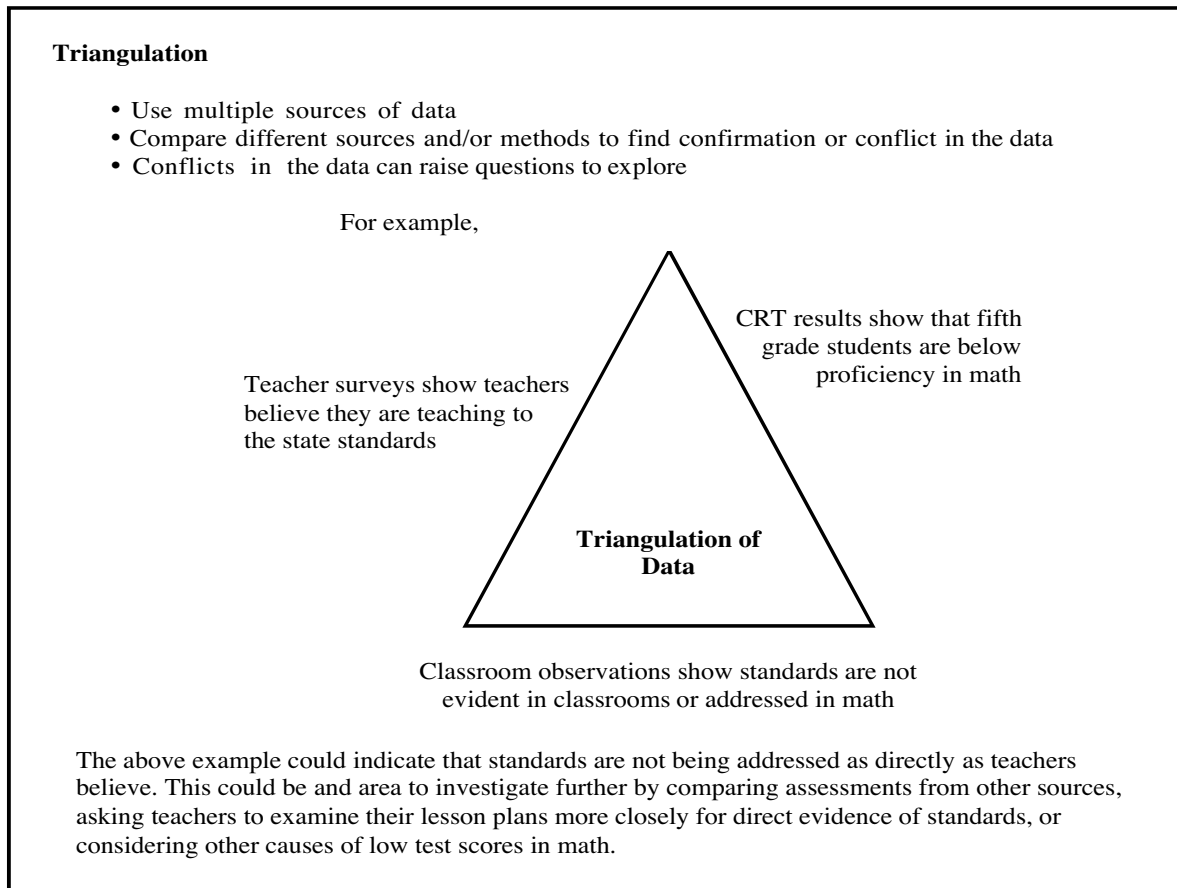
How the school examines data may depend on the size of the school staff and/or the size of the SIP team. One way to examine data and to involve the whole staff is to divide the SIP team into five leadership groups based on the five dimensions, one or two leaders per dimension. These leaders meet with staff members, explain the goal(s), and then discuss the questions in the DAG for the dimension they are leading, using the collected data and answering the questions in terms of their impact on student learning (i.e., the goal/s). The leaders will then return to the SIP team and report their findings and recommendations from the staff.

Another way to consider the data is to have the SIP team work together on each dimension or to divide into groups of two or three to look at one dimension per group.

Regardless of which way works best for the SIP team and staff, it is important to communicate the results to the entire staff. This can be done via whole staff or prep period meetings so that everyone is apprised of the direction the SIP team is suggesting for the school and so that everyone can provide input.

Data Triangulation can reveal potential disconnects between perception and reality. Using multiple sources of data, a SIP team can compare and contrast various pieces of information about the same topic to discover confirmation or conflict in the data. Figure 7 is an example of how information can be triangulated (See also Appendix G for a facilitator's overhead).

Figure 7. An Example of Triangulation



It is important to consider the weight of the value of the different pieces of evidence. Data fall into three main categories of reliability that can be based on a continuum: Objective data which includes demographic data, student achievement tests, and other assessments of learning; semi-objective data which includes observation; and subjective or perception data which includes surveys, interviews, and focus groups. It is the objective data that should carry the most weight. See Appendix G for an overhead on Data Source Reliability.

Mission and Beliefs. Upon completion of the needs assessment, the school is encouraged to review and analyze its mission and beliefs in light of any changes in schoolwide goals and within the school community since they were originally written. The review should take into account recent educational research. It is important in the review of the mission and shared beliefs to include members of the whole school community (See Mission and Beliefs in Part III for further information). Utilizing a collaborative process to define the beliefs and mission statement helps build support for a shared vision of the school.

Common Pitfalls and Tips

Planning teams often encounter several common pitfalls when conducting a comprehensive needs assessment. The External Facilitator may want to review these common pitfalls and some of the tips to overcome them before conducting the needs assessment step.

Pitfalls

- **Jumping to Solutions Rather Than Identifying Concerns.** The most common pitfall is that many planning teams get sidetracked in the needs assessment by identifying solutions rather than concerns. The statement, “we need a new reading program,” is a solution, not a concern. The concern is “our students have low reading achievement.” The appropriate time to generate solutions is during Step Two - Inquiry Process.
- **Collecting Meaningless Data.** It is important to conduct a “comprehensive” needs assessment to examine how curriculum, instruction, assessment, and intervention; learning environment and school culture; parent and community involvement; and professional development influence student learning. However, data collection should be focused on the important issues that describe the individual school.
- **Conducting Duplicate Needs Assessments.** If the school is conducting other needs assessments to meet the requirements of other initiatives, such as accreditation, the needs assessment efforts can be combined. It is not necessary to conduct a second needs assessment.
- **Neglecting to Use Good, Quality Data Collection Instruments.** Common instruments used in needs assessments include surveys, questionnaires, observations, and interviews. Developing good, quality data collection instruments requires training. Planning teams may want to use or revise existing instruments, or request expert advice. This planning guide includes survey instruments in Appendix F.

Planning teams that have conducted good needs assessments and have overcome these common pitfalls often use the strategies below as part of their needs assessment.

Tips

- **Assign Data Collection Responsibilities to Subcommittees** so that work is distributed to make data collection more efficient and to include all staff in the process.
- **Be Selective About the Type and Amount of Data Collected** by making sure the data is related to the five dimensions of school success in the Data Analysis Guide.
- **Integrate the School Improvement Needs Assessment with Other Needs Assessments** to make data collection more efficient.
- **Collect Information from all Stakeholders:** parents, students, teachers, and community members so that everyone has input into the process of developing the school improvement plan.

- **Develop Procedures to Share Results** with *all* staff and the school community so that everyone has an opportunity to react and provide input into the needs assessment.
- **Collect Longitudinal Data** so trends can be analyzed and changes in data can be interpreted correctly.
- **Hold back** from jumping to solutions before identifying clear causes of the concerns.
- **Consider Only the Concerns** over which the school has control.

Northwest Accreditation. Schools participating in the Northwest Accreditation process will find information in this step of SAGE compatible with Part I of the accreditation process. Follow the directions below to access the appropriate section of the Northwest Accreditation CD.

For Northwest Accreditation Purposes (Northwest Accreditation Toolkit CD)

Use the table “Additional Steps to SAGE for Northwest Accreditation” provided in this binder under “Northwest Accreditation and SAGE” in Part III to understand what additional steps may be required or information provided for Northwest Accreditation.

It is important for schools going through accreditation to conduct an analysis of the instructional and organizational effectiveness of the school. This review helps the school identify the structures and practices that are already in place to support achievement of the school improvement goals. The review also identifies what needs to be put in place to support the school improvement goals.

Then, using the Northwest Accreditation CD, follow the procedures below.

- a. Open CD “Cut to the Chase”
- b. Review INTRODUCTION, PROCESS AND PART I: “Telling the School’s Story”
- c. Review Part I Checklist for Response Team

Step Two — The Inquiry Process

The Inquiry Process

- Explore and Verify the Causes of Each Concern
- Investigate Possible Solutions
- Select Solutions to Fit the School Context

Step Two, The Inquiry Process, is a creative problem-solving process in which the school improvement planning team will:

- Investigate the causes of the concerns identified in the needs assessment,
- Research potential solutions that will address the needs, and
- Select improvement strategies that will best fit the unique needs of the school.

The inquiry process, modeled after scientific inquiry, is used to develop and test hypotheses about observed phenomena. The *Accelerated Schools Project* developed by Henry Levin of Stanford University uses inquiry in exploring alternative strategies to meet specific school problems. Dr. Levin states that inquiry “has been found to be the most frustrating and yet the most liberating part of the change process.”⁴ It is frustrating because it works in opposition to the traditional school practice of making quick decisions and because many school staff have had little or no experience with such a process. At the same time, the process is liberating, because it allows planning teams to solve complex school problems. This guidebook draws upon the inquiry process from the *Accelerated Schools* program.

The inquiry process follows a framework for creative problem solving. Without a framework, people flounder. Within the guidelines of a creative strategy, however, people can generate many creative, often more effective solutions that would not be possible otherwise.⁵

Inquiry Process

All staff can, and should, be involved in the inquiry process. The SIP team may find it helpful to have team members head subcommittees made up of staff members that investigate causes based on their interest or expertise. The subcommittees would be responsible for reporting back and sharing information, thus involving all staff members.

There are three steps to the inquiry process. A set of *Inquiry Worksheets* can be found in Appendix B to help planning teams through each step. The numbers on the *Inquiry Worksheets* correspond to the three steps in the inquiry process.

⁴ Levin, Henry M., *Trouble-Shooting Inquiry, Addressing the Challenges of the Inquiry Process*, Accelerated Schools, Volume 5, Number 4, Fall 1995. Stanford University, p. 2.

⁵ Foster, Jack. *How to Get Ideas*, 1996. San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

1. Investigate the Causes of the Identified Student Achievement Goal(s)

It has been said that the solution to any problem already exists. The real task is to ask the right questions that will reveal the underlying causes of the problem. Therefore, the first and most important step in the inquiry process is to understand fully each student achievement goal and why it exists. Because of the complexity of the educational process, the planning team will probably find several possible reasons that contribute to any single student achievement goal. The solution, then, may be a combination of strategies directed toward one or more causes of the identified student achievement goal(s). To understand fully why each student achievement goal exists, SIP teams will finally develop a list of possible causes and verify, by collecting data, whether these possible causes are accurate.

Through conducting the needs assessment, the SIP team has a list of strengths, concerns, and some causes related to the goal or goals, based on data examination in each dimension of school success. The task now is to review the causes, making sure they are based on data, and add other possible causes not uncovered during needs assessment. For example, the SIP team may have already identified five causes of the student achievement goal in the needs assessment. After reviewing these five causes, the SIP team may add two other possible reasons. A worksheet, found in Appendix B and similar to Table 2, will help the planning team organize its thinking.

Table 2. Possible Causes of Concerns Surrounding the Goal(s) (Sample)

Goal	Possible Causes	Documentation
Raise achievement in reading for all students, especially LEP students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading curriculum is not coordinated across grade levels. • Reading curriculum is not aligned with State standards. • Assessment methods conflict or are a poor match with instructional practices. • Curriculum materials are outdated and do not reflect current teaching philosophy and methodology. • Teachers do not have adequate training in reading strategies. 	

The planning team should then take time to explore and verify whether these two new possible causes are accurate. Schools must be careful not to select and implement solutions based upon erroneous explanations. In some cases, planning teams may need to collect additional information to determine whether the possible reasons are accurate.

For example, if the goal is “Raise achievement in reading for all students, especially LEP students,” the SIP team may have discovered that some factors are contributing more to the problem than others. Simply adding a new reading program may not solve the problem if that

particular reading program does not address the factors that contributed to the problem in the first place. If the school chooses a reading program that does not address LEP students but the cause of difficulty in reading is based on limited English proficiency in large numbers of students, the school has not chosen the best solution for the actual causes of difficulties in reading.

As shown in Table 3, some possible reasons are found to be inaccurate on further exploration. Solutions, of course, will need to address documented reasons. Causes that do not have documentation to support them are removed. Causes that do have documentation become verified causes.

Table 3. Documentation of Possible Causes (Sample)

The causes in bold below are not supported by documentation and should be removed.

Goal	Possible Causes	Documentation
Raise achievement in reading for all students, especially LEP students	Reading curriculum is not coordinated across grade levels.	Data from the teacher survey showed that teachers did not think the reading curriculum was coordinated across grade levels.
	Reading curriculum is not aligned with State standards.	The planning team conducted a match between the curriculum and State standards and found a good match.
	Assessment methods conflict or are a poor match with instructional practices.	The planning team conducted a follow-up teacher survey and determined that some assessment methods are not a good match with instructional practices.
	Instructional/teaching materials are outdated and do not reflect current teaching philosophy and methodology.	The planning team determined that most instructional/teaching materials were over 15 years old and did not reflect current teaching practices.
	Teachers do not have adequate training in reading strategies.	The teacher survey showed that most teachers had recently received professional development in reading.

2. Investigate Possible Solutions

After the planning team determines the verified causes for each goal, the team can investigate potential solutions. School teams made up of staff members should seek ideas for solutions and information about these solutions from many different sources, such as:

- District or state education offices, Regional Professional Development Programs, outside experts, successful practices in other schools, or the

Few people like problems. Hence the natural tendency in problem solving is to pick the first solution that comes to mind and run with it. The disadvantage of this approach is that one may run either off the cliff or into a worse problem than one started with. A better strategy in solving problems is to select the most attractive path from many ideas, or concepts.

James L Adams, *Conceptual Blockbusting, A Guide to Better Ideas*

Internet, (e.g., the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory has a catalog of effective programs on the Internet, <http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/natspec/catalog/index.html>);

- Other schools or districts with successful programs in a similar content area,
- Research and educational literature; and
- Brainstorming sessions.

A list of Internet Resources that contain research, strategy, and program information is provided in Part III: Additional Important Considerations and Information. Staff members interested in searching the Internet might take this list and begin browsing these sites in advance of the Inquiry step, becoming familiar with information to provide the staff and SIP team when it is appropriate. This could save time during the Inquiry phase and provide support for the search for possible solutions.

Through the inquiry process, planning teams identify possible solutions for the underlying causes of the concerns. Make sure that all causes for the student achievement goal are addressed by at least one solution. The information can be organized as in the example below (a blank worksheet for Inquiry - Step 2 can be found in Appendix B). Not all of the possible solutions below address the causes or fit the context of the school.

Table 4. Possible Solutions for Priority Need Area (Sample)

The solutions in bold below do not support the cause and should be removed.

Goal: Raise achievement in reading for all students, especially LEP students	
Verified Causes	Possible Research-based Solutions
Reading curriculum is not coordinated across grade levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop curriculum guidelines • Provide professional development for all teachers and paraprofessionals to develop a consistent philosophy and approach • Select and purchase new materials that are coordinated • Implement state language arts standards
Assessment methods conflict with instructional practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select or develop new assessment tools • Develop and implement a student portfolio system • Provide staff training in authentic/alternative assessment techniques • Change reporting system • Implement student-led conferences
Instructional/teaching materials are outdated and do not match current philosophy of teaching reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt a new reading series • Conduct professional development activities on effective reading strategies • Purchase new materials for readers'/writers' workshop • Purchase new books for library • Adopt an effective, research-based reading program

3. *Selecting Solutions to Fit the School Context*

In the previous step, the planning team, with staff input, searched for any possible solution that addressed the goal. In this step, the planning team looks critically at the list of potential solutions and crafts a solution with the local school context in mind. Adopting programs and practices simply because they have worked well at other sites does not ensure success, particularly when underlying conditions are different.

Strengths can often be used in developing strategies to help improve weaknesses. For instance, if the school documents low reading achievement, staff may find they have strengths in parent and community involvement or in staff collaboration. Either or both of these areas could be used as part of a solution to improve reading achievement. Successful strategies in one content area may be replicated in another.

The solutions selected by planning teams should match the causes of the school's concerns and **have a logical connection with the verified causes. For example, one of the solutions for the second cause in Table 4 is to change the reporting system rather than to change the assessment methods or the instructional practices. Changing the reporting system circumvents the problem and does not address student achievement.**

During the inquiry phase, the planning team should:

- Investigate both the advantages and the disadvantages of each proposed solution in the context of the school site;
- Ensure that the proposed solutions and strategies link directly to the underlying causes of the concerns;
- Explore the availability of resources to implement each solution, such as federal resources under NCLB (which allows for blending funds from a variety of sources) and state resources under the Nevada Revised Statutes Remediation Funding;
- Ensure intensive and sustained professional development; and
- Elicit input and support from the entire staff.

Once a list of proposed solutions is narrowed down, the SIP team should use the list of questions on the worksheet for Inquiry - Step 3, “Develop Solutions to Fit School Context” (Appendix B). Ask each question about each solution. Only solutions that pass all the questions with a favorable answer should be considered. This way of rating a solution will help ensure that it is one that will be actualized.

Common Pitfalls and Tips

Planning teams often encounter several common pitfalls in the implementation of the inquiry process. The External Facilitator may want to review these common pitfalls and some of the tips to overcome them before conducting the inquiry process.

Pitfalls

- **Not Verifying Causes of the Concerns.** Once concerns have been identified, it is critical to explore the underlying reasons why these concerns exist. Without an accurate explanation, it is difficult to develop appropriate solutions that will meet the goal(s).
- **Not Seeking Technical Assistance for Solutions.** The inquiry process takes time, primarily because it takes time to research and identify possible solutions. However, without technical assistance and research, planning teams may not discover what solutions work best and which ones are based on scientific research.

Planning teams that have conducted a thorough inquiry process and have overcome these common pitfalls often use the strategies below during the inquiry process.

Tips

- **Assigning Subcommittees to Investigate Solutions for Different Causes** based on people's interest in the cause or using the same subcommittees that identified it as a cause.
- **Tapping Multiple Resources**, such as universities, educational laboratories, Nevada Department of Education, Regional Professional Development Programs, etc., to identify a range of the best possible solutions.
- **Reviewing multiple solutions** so the solution that is finally selected is the best solution possible for the school.
- **Getting Input from Stakeholders on Selected Solutions** so that everyone feels part of the solution.
- **Developing Procedures to Share Results** with staff and the school community so that everyone has the opportunity to react to and provide input about the selected solutions before they are implemented.

Northwest Accreditation. Schools participating in the Northwest Accreditation process will find information in this step of SAGE compatible with Parts I-III of the accreditation process. Use the table "Additional Steps to SAGE for Northwest Accreditation" provided in this binder under "Northwest Accreditation and SAGE" in Part III to understand what additional steps may be required or information provided for Northwest Accreditation. Follow the directions below to access the appropriate section of the Northwest Accreditation CD.

For Northwest Accreditation Purposes (Northwest Accreditation Toolkit CD)

- a. Open CD “Cut to the Chase”
- b. Review PART I: “Telling the School’s Story”
- c. Review PART II: “Identifying the School’s Beliefs and Mission Statement”
- d. Review PART III: “What Students Should Know and Be Able to Do Upon Leaving School”
- e. Review Part II and Part III Checklist for Response Team

Step Three — Master Plan Design

Master Plan Design

- Develop an Action Plan to Implement Each Solution
- Integrate Action Plans Into a Master School Improvement Plan
- Create a Plan to Monitor Action Plans
- Determine Measurable Objectives for Goals
- Create a Plan to Evaluate Student Achievement and Supporting Goals

Step Three, Master Plan Design, is the “nuts and bolts” phase of the planning process. During this phase, the planning team outlines how the school will implement the solutions selected during the inquiry process.

Most planning teams implement solutions that will change school practices in areas such as curriculum and instruction or professional development. Not only must planning teams outline how they will implement each solution, but they must also integrate all of the solutions into a **master plan** so that staff and the school community know how the activities will be implemented and how they will support each other. This is where SIP teams organize solutions into activities that support the goals.

During Step Three, the planning team will -

- Develop an action plan for how key activities for each solution will be implemented;
- Integrate the action plans into a master plan, reviewing the plan for consistency and timeline;
- Create a plan to monitor action plans;
- Establish measurable objectives for student achievement and supporting goal(s); and
- Create a plan to evaluate the goal(s) based on refined objectives.

Master Plan Design

Below are the five steps to designing a master plan. Appendix C includes a set of *Master Plan Design Worksheets* to help planning teams through each step. The numbers on the *Master Plan Design Worksheets* correspond to the five steps in designing a master plan.

1. Developing an Action Plan to Implement Each Solution

An important part of the school improvement process is to develop clear descriptions of how each solution will be implemented. As part of the action plan, the planning team should identify four elements in implementing each solution so the school community knows how the solutions will be implemented. For each solution, the planning team will identify—

- The major action steps;
- When the action steps will be implemented;
- What resources are required to implement the action steps; and
- Who will be involved.

The key to developing a good action plan is to provide enough detail so staff know the key events and their responsibilities, but not so much detail that the plan is cumbersome. The example in Table 5 (following) provides a sufficient level of detail for teachers at a school who are implementing the hypothetical “Fast Fluency” as one of their solutions.

Table 5. Action Plan for a Solution (Sample)

Goal: Increase Student Achievement in Reading			
Objective:			
Action Steps to implement strategies	Timeline for implementing action steps	Resources , e.g., money, people, facilities	Person(s) Responsible , e.g., district, region, school
1. Select two “Fast Fluency” teachers for grade 1	May 2005	None	Principal
2. Enroll in “Fast Fluency” courses	June 2005	\$2000 for three graduate courses	Fast Fluency teachers
3. Assess all kindergarten students and identify low performing students in reading	June 2005	“Fast Fluency” assessments: \$250	Kindergarten teachers
4. Provide training in balanced literacy approach for all classroom teachers kindergarten through grade 5	September – December 2005	\$8,000 for trainer for four monthly workshops	Principal arranges training for all staff
5. Attend weekly training in “Fast Fluency”	September 2005	None	“Fast Fluency” teachers
6. Begin to implement “Fast Fluency” program, i.e., working with low performing first grade students	October 2005	None	“Fast Fluency” teachers
7. Meet bimonthly to discuss balanced literacy approach instructional strategies	October 2005-June 2006	None	All classroom teachers
8. Assess the progress of students in “Fast Fluency” and serve new students as needed	November 2005-June 2006	None	“Fast Fluency” teachers
9. Conduct observations of teachers implementing balanced literacy strategies and give feedback	January – May 2006	\$3,000 for trainer to conduct observations	Principal arranges with trainer and all staff
10. Conduct refresher workshop for classroom teachers in balanced literacy	April 2006	\$1,000 for trainer	Principal arranges with trainer

2. Integrate Action Plans Into a Master School Improvement Plan

After the planning team develops an action plan for each solution, it needs to integrate the plans from the different solutions into a master plan. The purpose is to make sure the solutions are consistent with each other and can realistically be implemented at the same time given the timeline, resources, and people involved. Oftentimes, planning teams will have to revise the implementation of individual solutions, because key action steps from different solutions are scheduled at the same time or the people involved in an activity for one solution are already committed to another activity at that time. To a lesser extent, the solutions may not be consistent with each other. For example, the action steps developed to involve parents in their children's learning at home may emphasize a phonics-based approach to reading when the new reading program emphasizes a balanced literacy approach. If a school makes this discovery, the action steps would have to be adjusted for consistency.

Though this integrated plan will not be required in the school improvement plan template to be submitted to the district, it is the most important plan for the school. This plan shows the overall picture of how the action steps will unfold for the most important participants and is the easiest way for the whole school to keep track of the chronological progress of the entire plan.

One way to integrate the action plans from different solutions is to list the key action steps from different solutions sequentially in the same form, according to the timeline of events, as shown below. The numbers under the "Integrated Action Plan Steps" column, e.g., 1.1, refer to the action plan for a goal and the action step number within the action plan.

Table 6. Master Plan for Combined Solutions (Sample)

Integrated Action Plan Steps to implement strategies	Timeline for implementing action steps	Resources , e.g., money, people, facilities	Person(s) Responsible , e.g., district, region, school
1.1 Select two "Fast Fluency" teachers for grade 1	May 2005	None	Principal
1.2 Enroll in "Fast Fluency" courses	June 2005	\$2000 for three graduate courses	"Fast Fluency" teachers
1.3 Assess all kindergarten students and identify low performing students in reading	June 2005	"Fast Fluency" assessments: \$250	Kindergarten teachers
2.1/3.1 Hire half-time Parent Involvement/School Discipline Coordinator	June 2005	\$25,000	Principal
2.2 Train Coordinator in Epstein's model of Parent Involvement	August 2005	\$1500 for training and materials	PI/SD Coordinator
3.2 Establish Student Behavior Action Team	Sept 2005	None	PI/SD Coordinator

A blank planning form is included in Appendix C to help planning teams integrate the plans for each solution into a master plan. In addition to being able to see the entire plan at a glance, the master plan is an effective way to communicate the improvement efforts to the school community. Typically, a plan stretches out over two years. For Northwest Accreditation purposes, the team will need to develop a five-year plan.

3. Create a Plan to Monitor Action Plans

A contributing factor as to why school improvement plans fail is that school staff are unable to implement—for a variety of reasons—all of the elements of the improvement plan. For example, teachers may not receive all of the training and support necessary to fully implement new instructional strategies. To help ensure the complete and successful implementation of master plan activities, planning teams must follow through on the monitoring of the plan.

As a starting point, the SIP team will build a plan to monitor the key action steps in each of the action plans developed in the first stage of Master Plan Design. These monitoring plans will be included in the school improvement plan template. Using the action plans, the SIP team can establish a system to collect data on:

- Whether scheduled action steps are accomplished, and (in some cases)
- How well the action steps are implemented, especially changes in key instructional practices.

A blank planning form, similar to the example below, is included in Appendix C to help planning teams develop monitoring plans. For each major action step from the action plan, space is provided on the monitoring form to identify the “data to collect,” “timeline” for collecting it, and the “entity responsible” for collecting the data. The “data to collect” can include a wide variety of data sources (e.g., survey, observation). Typically, SIP teams can easily determine what data to collect based on the activity that is implemented.

Two aspects of plan monitoring. Most key action steps only have to be monitored to determine whether the activities occurred on the scheduled timeline. Some key activities, on the other hand, have to be monitored to determine not only whether they occurred but also how well they were implemented.

As shown below, one key activity from an action plan is to assess all kindergarten students to identify the lowest 20 percent of the students. These students would then participate in the hypothetical “Fast Fluency” program. To monitor the activity, the planning team would determine whether the kindergarten students were assessed on the scheduled timeline and whether the lowest 20 percent of students were identified. If the assessment and/or identification did not occur, the team would have to revise the timeline for implementing “Fast Fluency” and perhaps find other supplemental services for the children. The SIP team, however, does not need to determine how well the assessments were completed, because the assessments are not directly linked to be the student outcomes of the plan.

Table 7. Monitoring a Key Action Step to Determine if the Activity Occurred (Sample)

Goal: Increase skills in mathematics			
Action Step to monitor	Data to collect	Timeline for collecting data	Person(s) Responsible , e.g., district, region, school
1. Teachers are trained in new mathematics instructional problem solving strategies.	List of participating teachers. Survey teachers to determine if training met their needs.	A week after the training	Implementation team
2. Teachers implement new mathematics instructional strategies.	Teacher self-assessment of how well strategies are implemented, using a rubric developed for the strategies.	January 2006 and May 2006	Grade level teams

In addition to monitoring action steps for completion, key activities that change the core instructional program should be monitored to determine how well these new activities/strategies are implemented. The quality of the implementation of these activities can be directly linked to student outcomes.

For example, if teachers attend a weeklong summer institute on new mathematics instructional strategies, the SIP team might note who attended and survey those teachers to obtain feedback on how well the training met their needs. More importantly, the planning team might assess how well the teachers implement the new instructional strategies. One way is to ask teachers to self-assess how well they implemented the new instructional strategies using a rubric developed for the new strategies. Ideally, information about how well teachers implement new instructional strategies will dovetail with data collected about student learning. That is, the SIP team may find that it can attribute the level of student gains in mathematics, in part, to the level of implementation of the new instructional strategies in mathematics.

Table 8 shows how new instructional activities will be monitored both for completion and for effectiveness.

Table 8. Monitoring a Key Action Step to Determine How Well it is Implemented (Sample)

Goal: Increase skills in language arts			
Action Step to monitor	Data to collect	Timeline for collecting data	Person(s) Responsible , e.g., district, region, school
1. Assess all kindergarten students and identify low performing students in language arts	List of low performing students	September 2005	“Fast Fluency” teachers

SIP teams might want to use the following three steps to help them develop a procedure to monitor the effectiveness of the implementation of changes in the core instructional program.

- Determine the important elements of the new instructional program, e.g., shared writing, guided reading;
- Develop a rubric to describe the quality of implementation, e.g., “1” is not evident to “4” is refined implementation; and
- Establish a method (e.g., self-assessment, observation) to collect data on the implementation of the new instructional program periodically (e.g., mid-year, end-of-year).

4. Determine Measurable Objectives for Student Achievement and Supporting Goals

Spending time developing appropriate, realistic, and measurable objectives for each school improvement goal is an important responsibility of the planning team. Planning teams will now develop measurable objectives for the goals they established during the Comprehensive Needs Assessment and insert them into each action plan. By creating measurable objectives, the team more clearly articulates what it hopes to achieve through the school improvement plan.

There are two types of goals: student achievement outcome goals and supporting outcome goals. The only difference between the two is that student outcome goals focus only on what students will learn or accomplish as a result of the school improvement plan. Supporting outcome goals include all additional outcomes, whether for parents, teachers, students, or the community. The reason for the distinction is that it is critical for school improvement plans to include student achievement outcome goals as their primary needs since student learning is the focus of all school improvement efforts. However, school improvement plans may include supporting outcome goals that support student learning. These supporting goals may also be included as action steps that sustain the primary achievement goals.

The elements in writing objectives for both student achievement goals and supporting goals are the same. (A blank planning form is in Appendix C to help planning teams write objectives.) Clear and concise objectives contain five elements:

1. *Goal—A descriptive statement of what the planning team wants to see happen (e.g., increased reading comprehension, increased parent involvement).*

2. *Outcome Indicator—The assessment instrument used to measure success.*
3. *Baseline—The current level of performance on the outcome indicator.*
4. *Standard or Performance Level— The expected level of performance on the outcome indicator.*
5. *Timeline— The timeline for when the standard or performance level will be reached.*

As mentioned previously, planning teams develop measurable objectives for each goal they established during the comprehensive needs assessment. For example, suppose a planning team established a goal of, “Students will improve their reading comprehension.” As part of their school improvement plan, they adopted a scientifically based reading program to improve student reading comprehension. A measurable objective might be -

- Students in grades 6-8 will show an increase in reading comprehension (goal) as measured by the State Criterion-Referenced Test in Reading (CRT) (outcome indicator). Current results indicate that 50 percent of our students are proficient or above (baseline). At the end of year one (timeline), 55 percent of students will be proficient or above (standard or performance level). At the end of year three, 60 percent of students will be proficient or above (standard or performance level).

Since all schools in the state must demonstrate AYP based on statewide assessments, it makes sense that school planning teams use these assessments as measures of student progress. However, this does not mean that district level or even school assessments should not be used to measure student achievement.

Planning teams should consider the information they collected for the school profile to help write objectives. Oftentimes, data from the needs assessment can be used as **baseline** data for objectives.

Below are some other examples of clear, measurable student objectives.

- Students in grade 4 will show an increase in math computation as measured by the ITBS. Current records indicate that students make an average Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) gain of 3 points. At the end of year one, students will make an average NCE gain of 5 points on the ITBS. At the end of year two, students will make an average NCE gain of 10 points on the ITBS.
- Students will improve their reading skills. Current records show that over half of the students are below the “Approaches Standard” level on the State Criterion Referenced Test (CRT). Upon three years of successful implementation of Success For All, students who have attended Franklin for the full three years will score in the “Meets Standard” to “Exceeds Standard” levels on the State CRT.
- Students will improve their reading skills—
 - Students in grades 3 to 5 will show a five-point gain on the district Achievement Level Test (ALT) given in the spring.

- Students reading below grade level in grades 3 to 5 will show at least a 1.5 grade gain on the STAR assessment of the Accelerated Reader Program by the end of the school year.
- Students in kindergarten to grade 2 will show a five-point standard score gain on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test administered every fall.

As an example of a supporting goal, a planning team established a goal of, “Parents will be more involved in school activities.” As part of its school improvement plan, the planning team designed a new program to encourage parents to volunteer at school. A measurable objective for that goal might be -

- Parent involvement will increase (goal) as measured by the number of parents who volunteer one hour per week in school (outcome indicator). Current records show that 30 percent of parents volunteer one hour per week (baseline). At the end of the first year (timeline), 40 percent of parents will volunteer at least one hour per week (standard or performance level). At the end of the second year (timeline), 50 percent of parents will volunteer at least one hour per week (standard or performance level).

Below are some examples of **poor** objectives.

- Disciplinary referrals at School A are presently at an all-time low with only one student being suspended through the first quarter of the 2005-06 school year. I would hope to meet or exceed this record, though it is almost impossible. (No need for an objective in this area.)
- The school shall document increased student participation in the School-to-Careers Programs as a result of the technology and School to Careers Programs of 15 percent. (The objective does not contain a baseline and timeline.)
- Increase scores on the standardized testing. (Goal only: does not contain any of the other four elements.)

Achievement level and achievement progress. When developing student outcome objectives, planning teams should distinguish between assessments that measure **achievement level** and those that measure **achievement progress**. Assessments that measure achievement level show the relative achievement levels of different groups of students at the same time of year annually. For example, an achievement level objective might be, “Students in grades 3 and 5 will show an increase in reading comprehension as measured by the State Criterion-Referenced Test in Reading—spring to spring.” While this type of data can show general trends of student performance over time, interpretations of student scores from one year to the next can be misleading because they represent the achievement levels of different groups of students. The achievement levels of different groups of students can rise and fall due to reasons other than the implementation of activities in the school improvement plan. Assessments that measure longitudinal student achievement progress, on the other hand, are better indicators of the effect of a school improvement plan than assessments that measure achievement level. Assessments that measure achievement progress can track the progress of the same group of students from one

time period to the next time period and link that progress more directly to the implementation of a specific program.

Whenever possible, planning teams should try to identify assessments that will allow the school to measure student progress. An example of a measurable objective for achievement progress is, “Students in grades 3-5 will show an increase in reading comprehension as measured by the Reading Achievement Levels Test (ALT)—spring to spring.” Achievement Levels Tests measure growth from one point in time to the next.

Short-term versus long-term objectives. Often schools write long-term measurable objectives, such as the ones presented above, that examine student performance over a year. However, it is also important to write short-term measurable objectives to assess student progress during the course of the school year toward the long-term objective. For example, schools may want to assess student progress using classroom assessments at the end of each quarter.

Below are examples of other short-term measurable objectives:

- Using a schoolwide rubric based on the State writing rubric, students in grades 3-6 will show a increase of 1-2 points in scores on quarterly writing assessments given in class.
- Students will demonstrate a 5% increase in individual scores on the six-week reading inventory.
- Students in the new proficiency-focused intervention class for 8th grade will show an increase in attendance, turning in homework, and general class grades in English as measured by student data collection and teacher conferences every six-weeks.

5. Create a Plan to Evaluate Student Achievement and Supporting Goals

Just monitoring the implementation of a plan is not enough to know if it is succeeding or not. It is important to have a plan to collect data on how students are achieving along the way to see how well the plan is working for the school to accomplish its goals. For each goal, the planning team needs to specify the data to collect (the outcome indicator), when to collect the data, and the person responsible for data collection. A blank planning form, similar to the example below, is included in Appendix C to help planning teams develop an assessment plan for each school improvement goal. This evaluation plan will be included in the school improvement plan template.

Schools must to collect data to evaluate progress in terms of achievement data: long-term achievement level and ongoing achievement progress. Schools must also collect data to evaluate short-term objectives.

Table 9. Plan to Evaluate the Goal (Sample)

Goal: Increase Achievement in Reading	Data to collect	Timeline for collecting data	Person(s) Responsible, e.g., district, region, school
Students in grades 3-5 will show 10% increase in reading comprehension as measured by the State Criterion-Referenced Test in Reading—spring to spring	CRT scores in Reading, grades 3 & 5	Spring 2006 and spring 2007	Planning Team
Students in grades 3-5 will show a 10% increase in reading comprehension as measured by the Reading Achievement Levels Test (ALT) – spring to spring	Results of Individual ALT reading assessment tests	Spring - annually	Teachers will share and analyze results during grade level meetings. Grade level reps will report to planning team
Students in grades 3-5 will demonstrate a 5% increase in individual scores on the six-week reading inventory.	Results of reading inventory	Every 6 weeks	Teachers will share and analyze results during grade level meetings. Grade level reps will report to planning team

Finally, planning teams should have the school community review the draft of the master plan. This step will help ensure the planning team developed a quality school improvement plan that effectively communicates the solutions and the key activities. Title I schools in improvement must submit their plans to the school district for peer review.

Common Pitfalls and Tips

Pitfalls

Planning teams often encounter several common pitfalls in the implementation of master plan design. Planning teams may want to review these common pitfalls and some of the tips to overcome them before conducting the master plan design step.

- **Not Outlining the Master Plan in Sufficient Detail** to guide implementation and communicate improvement efforts to the school community.
- **Not “Setting the Stage” for (or Attending to) Change** so that school staff and the community support school improvement design.
- **Not Communicating the New School Improvement Program to the School Community** so that all are aware of the changes that will take place.

Planning teams that have conducted a thorough master plan design and have overcome these common pitfalls often used the strategies below as part of their planning procedure.

Tips

- **Developing a Strategic Action Plan for Each Solution or Major Plan Component.** Each solution should be outlined on planning forms and included as part of the master plan. Planning teams should not assume that activities are “understood.”
- **Identifying Potential Implementation Barriers and Problem Solve.** Planning teams that have successfully implemented their plans anticipate potential implementation problems and plan ways to address them.
- **Assigning Implementation Responsibilities.** The master plan should clearly indicate each person’s responsibilities in implementing the plan.
- **Developing Procedures to Share the Master Plan with the School Community.** The school community needs to know what and how solutions will be implemented so they can support the program.

Northwest Accreditation. Schools participating in the Northwest Accreditation process will find information in this step of SAGE compatible with Parts III-V of the accreditation process. Use the table “Additional Steps to SAGE for Northwest Accreditation” provided in this binder under “Northwest Accreditation and SAGE” in Part III to understand what additional steps may be required or information provided for Northwest Accreditation. Follow the directions below to access the appropriate section of the Northwest Accreditation CD.

Note: Plans for Northwest Accreditation must project out five years.

For Northwest Accreditation Purposes (Northwest Accreditation Toolkit CD)

- a. Open CD “Cut to the Chase”
- b. Review PART III: “What Students Should Know and Be Able to Do Upon Leaving School”
- c. Review PART IV: “Determining What is in Place and What Needs to Be Put into Place both Schoolwide and in the Individual Classrooms”
- d. Review PART V: “Plan for Action”
- e. Review Part III, IV and V Checklist for Response Team

Step Four — Implementation and Evaluation

Implementation and Evaluation

- Monitor the Action Plan and the Plan to Evaluate Goals
- Create a Climate of Ongoing Review of School Improvement Activities

Step Four, Implementation and Evaluation, recognizes the dynamic quality of successful school reform by offering guidance in implementing the school improvement plan and evaluating its progress. Schools use the results of the evaluation phase of the plan to guide and make adjustments in implementation.

Regrettably, many schools create beautiful plans for improvement that end up on a shelf and are never put into action. Sometimes there are changes in staff or leadership that hinder the unfolding of the plan. The plan must remain the guiding document for the school in spite of all changes that may occur in personnel. The plan should be a living document that evolves according to the successes or needs of the students during the implementation of the plan. Therefore, the planning team must be vigilant in ensuring that the action steps are begun and consistent evaluation of improvement takes place. Below are procedures that teams and schools should follow in order to support the purposeful and successful implementation of the plan.

To begin the implementation process, the school should form an implementation team. Typically, the implementation team includes many members from the school improvement planning team (if it is not simply the continuation of the SIP team) who developed the monitoring and evaluation plans to collect data on goals during Master Plan Design. This team is an important leadership committee and should meet on a consistent basis to monitor the progress of the key action steps and timelines of the school improvement plan. Instituting a formal review process encourages timely completion of scheduled activities, and offers opportunities to revise components of the improvement plan as needed. Should changes in leadership or staff occur, this is the group that will maintain the focus and endurance of the plan. Other teams can be formed as offshoots of this group to help distribute duties and involve all staff in the implementation and evaluation process. For example, data collection and/or evaluation teams can be formed to assemble information and report to the implementation team.

During the Implementation and Evaluation phase, the planning/implementation team will—

- Monitor the action plan and the plan to evaluate goals by using the monitoring and evaluation plans created during Master Plan Design; and
- Create a climate of ongoing review of school improvement activities.

Implementation and Evaluation Process

A set of *Implementation and Evaluation Worksheets* is in Appendix D to help planning teams through each step. The numbers on the *Evaluation Worksheets* correspond to the two steps in implementation and evaluation.

1. Monitor the Action Plan and the Plan to Evaluate Goals

Using the plans for monitoring and evaluation created in Master Plan Design (Plan to Monitor Action Plans and Plan to Evaluate Student Achievement and Supporting Goals), the implementation team should establish a system to determine the extent to which the action steps are successful.

During the early stages of implementation, the data collected may mainly be focused on how well the activities to meet the student achievement goals are aligned with the plan (Monitoring Plan). This type of data should give the team information about the status of the school improvement plan, which they then should report to the whole staff. Don't forget to use this data to report on progress and celebrate successes, no matter how small! Remember that progress toward the goals may not occur immediately and success will take even longer. However, consistently evaluating the status of the plan will keep the school on course in relation to the original goals. Deviating from the plan or changing it arbitrarily can thwart its success.

The implementation team should first pull up the Monitoring Plan from Master Plan Design - Step 3 and use it as the guide and checklist for reminding the team and other persons responsible to follow up on the progress and success of the school improvement plan action steps. Remember, some action steps will simply be monitored for completion, others may require a certain amount of data or evidence collection to decide how well the step is being accomplished.

Table 10. Monitoring Plan (Created in Master Plan Design - Step 3) (Sample)

Goal: Increase skills in mathematics			
Objective: The number of students performing at the proficient level in math will increase by 15%, as demonstrated by the spring State Criterion-Referenced Test.			
Action Step to monitor	Data to collect	Timeline for collecting data	Person(s) Responsible, e.g., district, region, school
1. Assess all K-1 students in math	List of low performing students	September 2007	Math teachers
2. Teachers are trained in new mathematics instructional problem solving strategies.	List of participating teachers. Survey teachers to determine if training met their needs.	A week after the training	Implementation team

3. Teachers implement new mathematics instructional strategies.	Teacher self-assessment of how well strategies are implemented, using a rubric developed for the strategies.	January 2007 and May 2007	Grade level teams
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Next, the implementation team should take the Plan to Evaluate the Goal(s) and use it as the guide and checklist for reminding the team and other persons responsible to collect data and to follow up on evaluating the progress and success of the school improvement plan long-term and short-term objectives. Table 11 below is an example of a Plan to Evaluate the Goal that an implementation team might follow.

Table 11. Plan to Evaluate the Goal(s) (Created in Master Plan Design - Step 5) (Sample)

Goal: Increase reading skills for all students	Data to collect	Timeline for collecting data	Person(s) Responsible, e.g., district, region, school
Students in grades 3-5 will show a 10% increase in reading comprehension as measured by the Reading Achievement Levels Test (ALT)—spring to spring. [Achievement progress]	Results of individual ALT reading assessment tests	Spring testing	Teachers will share and analyze results during grade level meetings. Grade level reps will report to planning team.
Students in grades 3-5 will show a 10% increase in reading comprehension as measured by the State Criterion-Referenced Test in Reading—spring to spring [Achievement level]	CRT scores in Reading, grades 3 & 5	Spring 2006 and spring 2007	Planning Team
Students in grade 3-5 will show a 10% increase in reading skills as measured by an appropriate formative reading assessment. [Short-term objective]	Results of reading assessment	Every 8 weeks	Teachers will share and analyze results during grade level meetings. Grade level reps will report to planning team.

2. Create a Climate of Ongoing Review of School Improvement Activities

A major reason that school improvement plans fail to show success is that they are not kept in the forefront of the school's daily life and procedures. Those plans that are put on the shelf and forgotten or begun but neglected will obviously never contribute to the achievement of the students at the school. It is therefore the responsibility of the implementation team, with the help of administration and staff, to commit to seeing that the plan is followed, results are evaluated, successes are celebrated, and revisions are undertaken as needed.

In this step of Implementation and Evaluation, the implementation team will schedule meetings and choose tactics to monitor and promote the school improvement plan.

Below is a list of suggestions the implementation team should consider in order to monitor and support follow-through on the master plan and to promote successful implementation.

- **Start the new year with the plan.** As the new school year begins, reintroduce the school improvement plan to the whole school, refresh the purpose of the goals, and rekindle enthusiasm for moving forward together. Make sure all of the necessary material needs are accounted for and that training, programs, etc., are ready to start when they should. Briefly review the plan at Back to School Nights or parent meetings. Send information home to parents, translating into home languages, if necessary.
- **Schedule regular meeting times.** Committing to regular meeting times for the implementation team to review plan progress is crucial. Use the monitoring plan to maintain a checklist of the master plan activities, timelines, and people responsible. Discuss this list at each meeting. Plan ahead for what information should be reported at the next meeting and who will be responsible for collecting it.
- **Plan for time to continue the six foundations of school improvement.** Consciously plan in time for teacher collaboration and the other foundations that promote school improvement – governance, decision-making, teambuilding, communication, and managing change. Remembering these will keep the focus of school improvement in the forefront. Build in a mechanism for peer coaching and modeling, observing, and sharing between classrooms.
- **Plan for helping new personnel.** Staff changes. Think ahead to how your school will orient new personnel to the culture of a school improvement plan and how they will be brought up to speed with information, expectations, mentoring, and professional development. If leadership does change, the plan should live on as the guiding document of the school. The new leadership should be well-informed about the plan and committed to implementing it.
- **Create visual reminders.** What we see before us tends to be the task that gets accomplished! Have posters of the main goals and action steps of the plan hanging in various places around the school. Make a copy for the principal for his/her office. Create large posters to hang in the entrance of the school, the cafeteria, the library, or the gym. The whole school community should be aware of the focus of the school improvement plan and be reminded of it. Students and staff should be able to name the major goals of improvement at the school.
- **Bring in some outside eyes.** Find out who can come to the school, observe, and give feedback about your progress with the plan. Are you following the plan or are some things sliding by? How are things progressing in the classrooms? Would a new round of classroom observations give helpful information?
- **What do you do with students who are not improving?** Brainstorm innovative ways of reaching students who, after a reasonable time, are not responding to school

improvement efforts. What might be plan A, B, or C? Are interventions in place and coordinated? Is funding aligned to support goals and individual students?

- **Do not change the plan arbitrarily.** A lot of time, thought, and hard work have gone into your school improvement plan. Do not make changes before a reasonable time has elapsed and you have evidence through evaluation that something is not working or could be done better.
- **Celebrate successes.** Find a way to enjoy successes together. Since it can take some time before the long-term school improvement results are visible, it is important to acknowledge the small successes along the way. These could be celebrated periodically on a school wide basis in classrooms or through congratulatory school wide announcements. Staff could acknowledge growth at staff or department meetings. The community can be informed at parent/teacher organization meetings or board meetings. Also, information that is announced publicly helps to keep us on track with what we say we are going to do.
- **Advertise successes and progress.** Good PR does not just happen. Find ways to get the good news out not only to staff, students, and parents, but the whole community. The list of methods is long! To name a few: newsletters, student presentations at school board meetings or local organizations, student newspapers made available in community settings, local radio station newscasts, future teachers invited to visit the school, etc.

A planning sheet, such as the one displayed below, can help organize the implementation and support activities. A blank planning sheet can be found in Appendix D. The team should schedule meetings in advance and describe the activities they have chosen to keep the school focused on the school improvement goal(s).

Table 12. Plan to Implement and Support the School Improvement Goals (Sample)

Meeting Date/Time/Place	Implementation Support Activity	Person(s) Responsible	Timeline
Monday, Sept. 8 2:15 p.m. Library	Mr. Jones' art class will create goal posters to hang in the school entry	Mr. Jones	End of September
Monday, Oct. 6 2:15 p.m. Library	Discuss presentation of school improvement plan to parents	Principal and teacher representative	October PTO meeting or Back to School Night
Mon., Nov. 3 8:00 a.m. Mr. Jones' room	Develop presentation to whole staff of data and information about school improvement goals collected so far	Implementation team members and their data collection assistants	For faculty meeting, November 15

Common Pitfalls and Tips

Planning and implementation teams often encounter several common pitfalls in the implementation and evaluation phase. Planning and implementation teams may want to review these common pitfalls and some of the tips to overcome them before conducting the evaluation step.

Pitfalls

- **Not Meeting Regularly** to monitor whether plan activities have been implemented as scheduled and whether they were successful.
- **Expecting Miracles** in increased student achievement to occur overnight.
- **Forgetting the Six Foundations of School Improvement.** Team Building, Teacher Collaboration and Communication are crucial to the implementation of the plan, Governance and Decision-Making should continue at every meeting, and, of course, since school improvement **is change**, Managing Change should be a part of everyday life at the school.

Planning and implementation teams that monitor the implementation of their plan and conduct a thorough evaluation have often overcome these common pitfalls by using the strategies below as part of their evaluation.

Tips

- **Assign Teams to Monitor Major Plan Components.** The teams that selected the solutions and developed the plan for implementation should be the same teams that monitor their implementation. These teams are the most familiar with the solution and how it should be implemented.
- **Review Implementation and Progress Periodically.** Most implementation teams must “fine-tune” their improvement plan during the school year. Teams that meet regularly are in the best position to revise plan activities. Remember to let the data guide changes in the plan, if any.
- **Link Progress to Implementation of Plan Components.** The best explanation for plan results is whether the school implemented the solutions as planned. The degree to which a school implemented master plan action steps should help explain outcomes.
- **Expect Positive Results to Emerge Over Time.** The impact of any comprehensive change in school practices emerges over time. Do not become discouraged if expected outcomes are not reached overnight.
- **Design Procedures to Share Results with the School Community.** The school community needs to know if the improvement plan is successful. The school community may be able to help interpret improvement plan results and they need to be involved in decisions about plan revisions.

- **Remember the Six Foundations of School Improvement.** Team Building, Teacher Collaboration, Communication, Governance, Decision-Making, and Managing Change are the supporting pillars that will keep the school moving forward throughout the hard work of implementation, change, and evaluation.

Northwest Accreditation. Schools participating in the Northwest Accreditation process will find information in this step of SAGE compatible with Part VI of the accreditation process. Use the table “Additional Steps to SAGE for Northwest Accreditation” provided in this binder under “Northwest Accreditation and SAGE” in Part III to understand what additional steps may be required or information provided for Northwest Accreditation. Follow the directions below to access the appropriate section of the Northwest Accreditation CD.

For Northwest Accreditation Purposes (Northwest Accreditation Toolkit CD)

- a. Open CD “Cut to the Chase”
- b. Review PART VI: “Implementing the Action Plan”
- c. Review Part VI Checklist

Epilogue

You are now at the point where the school improvement cycle begins again. Turn to data, data, data to give you the necessary evidence to look analytically at causes of both successes and needs of your school. Use ongoing data collection and analysis to drive decisions about student achievement, instruction, professional development, and changes or adjustments to the school improvement plan.

This is not the end! This is really the beginning of the impact you will make on the achievement of your students and the future of your school in general. Keep your focus — through ongoing, committed improvement efforts, you will make a difference!



PART III

Additional Important Considerations and Information

Internet Resources for School Improvement

The websites listed below are offered as resources of information for SIP teams beginning their search for possible solutions in step 3 of the inquiry process.

<http://www.doe.nv.gov>

Nevada Department of Education website. Watch for links to professional development with a state calendar, school improvement, and data access.

<http://www.MarcoPolo-education.org>

Visit the Nevada section for research and lessons based on Nevada content standards.

<http://www.ascd.org>

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. This website contains a wealth of links to research and resources.

<http://www.annenberginstitute.org>

Click on the Annenberg Institute for School Reform

<http://www.thegateway.org>

Sorts by grade level, subject area, research.

<http://search.ed.gov/csi/results.html>

This is a key website as it provides links to other websites and allows you to enter a search phase (effective reading practices, parent involvement) which will then link you to a host of resources.

<http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/ntspec/catalog/index.html>

A catalog of effective programs

<http://www.rand.org/multi/achievementforall/>

<http://www.enc.org>

Eisenhower National Clearinghouse. Resources for math, science, and English/language arts.

<http://www.wested.org>

WestEd Regional Laboratory.

<http://www.mcrel.org/products/learning/raising.html> “Raising the Achievement of Low Performing Students”

<http://www.pta.org/parentinvolvement/standards/index.asp>

“National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs”

<http://www.piqe.com> Parent Institute of Quality Education

<http://www.nwrel.org/psc/bestofnw> Promising practices

<http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs>

“School Improvement Research Series. Research You Can Use”

<http://www.effectiveschools.com>

<http://www.prrac.org/additup.pdf>

“Add It Up: Using Research to Improve Education for Low-Income and Minority Students”

<http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/re-engineering/keyissues/schoolfamily.shtml>

Students at the Center. “School, Family, and Community Partnerships”

<http://www.ncela.gwu.edu>

Office of English Language Acquisition: National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition

<http://cal.org>

Center for Applied Linguistics

<http://crede.org>

Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence

<http://tesol.org>

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

Resources for School Improvement Planning and Management

- Bernhardt, V. (2002). *The School Portfolio Toolkit: A Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation Guide for Continuous School Improvement*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.
- Brandt, R.S. (Ed.) (1990). *Students At Risk*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Bullard, P. & Taylor, B.O. (1993). *Making School Reform Happen*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
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- DuFour, R. and Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional Learning Communities at Work*. Bloomington, IN: National Education Service.
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- Pechman, E. (1998). *Implementing Schoolwide Programs, Volume I: An Idea Book on Planning*. Vol. I. Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates (prepared for the U.S. Department of Ed.).
- Schlechty, P.C. (1990). *Schools for the 21st Century: Leadership Imperatives for Educational Reform*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.
- Scholtes, P.R. & Associates (1988). *The Team Handbook: How to use teams to improve quality*. Madison, WI: Joiner Associates, Inc.
- Smith, S.C. & Scott, J.J. (1990). *The Collaborative School: A work environment for effective instruction*. Eugene, OR: ERIC
- Sparks, D. (2002). *Designing Powerful Professional Development for Teachers and Principals*. Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.
- Sparks, D. and Hirsh, S. (1997). *A New Vision for Staff Development*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- U.S. Department of Education (1998). *Turning Around Low-Performing Schools: A Guide for State and Local Leaders*. Washington, DC: Author.

Mission and Beliefs

One might say that the obvious mission of a school participating in school improvement would be to increase student achievement. However, for a mission to have real meaning for school improvement, the people involved in the endeavor must be in agreement as to what that mission represents to each individual and to the group as a whole. Creating a shared vision for student learning through mission and belief statements can lead and support the school in many ways.

The Mission Statement

If your school already has a mission statement in place, it is important that all stakeholders revisit the existing mission statement, agree if it is still the purpose you are working towards, reconfirm its guidance for the improvement of the school, and recommit to it. If a mission statement does not exist for your school, this is the perfect time to draw the school community together and create one.

A mission statement does not need to be lengthy or academic. In fact, it should be a clear and concise statement that reflects the beliefs of the school. It should focus on learning for all students, be easily understood by all, and should serve as the school's "call to action."

Two questions to consider when creating a mission statement will help direct its creation.

- Why do we exist?
- What is the role the school must assume in shaping the future and providing educational opportunities for all students?

Sample school mission statements include:

- Our mission is to establish a strong foundation for lifelong learning by nurturing, guiding, and challenging all of our students to achieve their maximum potential.
- It is the mission of our school to provide its students with opportunities designed to meet individual needs and to ensure that every child has experiences that promote growth in each area of development.
- The school is a diverse community committed to the success of all learners as they become knowledgeable, responsible, and caring citizens.

Belief Statements

Beliefs are statements that should be closely aligned with the mission statement and represent the majority of the school community. Belief statements support the goals for student learning and guide the way a school is organized, as well as the delivery of instruction. These are statements that reflect academic, social, and developmental needs of the students being served by the school.

Some sample belief statements are:

- Student learning is the priority for our school.
- The biggest determinant of student progress is teaching effectiveness.
- Students should be provided with a variety of opportunities to demonstrate their achievements.

To determine whether mission or belief statements need to be revised, a school may use the following questions from the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) as guides:

- Are our beliefs reflected in our actions in behalf of student learning?
- Does our mission drive our decisions impacting the work of the school?

Vision Statements

While a mission statement indicates what a school stands for, and belief statements address how a school will support that standing, a vision statement looks to the future and answers the question, “What kind of school do we hope to become?” It is based on collective inquiry into the research and learning about best practices, as well as on what the staff says is important and what they want their school to become. A compelling vision makes that future a reality. It forms the basis for school improvement planning, budgeting, and staff development, among other important endeavors of the school.

Below are some sample vision statements:

We envision a school in which:

- curriculum stimulates active engagement on the part of the students;
- staff unite to achieve a common purpose and clear goals;
- students accept responsibility for their own learning and actions.

Some schools create vision statements by category and list a few statements under each one, such as curriculum, students, leadership, school climate, personnel, etc.

In creating mission, belief, or vision statements, it is important to include the entire staff to ensure shared meaning and a sense of ownership from all involved. It is not the actual statements that are the most important result; it is the process that people go through together that gives the words and statements meaning. If the mission, beliefs, and vision have real meaning to the whole school they can truly have an impact on its future improvement.

References

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Northwest Accreditation and the Nevada School Improvement Process (SAGE)

The Nevada State Committee for Accreditation believes that the school improvement process provides a vehicle for schools to make meaningful change with the goal of improving student performance. All school stakeholders, including the administration, teachers, parents, students, and community, assess the components of the educational environment and develop a school improvement plan to foster student academic achievement.

With this in mind, the Committee has created the CD “Cutting to the Chase - Understanding the School Improvement Process – Targeting Student Achievement.”

It was decided that because the Nevada School Improvement Process (SAGE) and the Northwest Association of Schools process walk hand in hand towards the ultimate goal of improving student academic achievement, an opportunity would be provided for all Nevada schools going through the school improvement process to apply for accreditation. With this as the ultimate goal, the Nevada State Committee is providing each school in Nevada going through the school improvement process a copy of the Northwest Toolkit CD to use in linking the SAGE plan with Northwest Accreditation procedures. This handbook, provided in CD form, is designed to assist schools as they begin and work through the school improvement process for Northwest Accreditation. It is intended to simplify the process, to cut to the chase, and to enable involved stakeholders to work more efficiently, as opposed to harder, as they participate in this critical process. This handbook is not intended to replace any of the suggested materials schools typically utilize during this process; however, it is intended to provide an easy to follow overview of the work that is required for each section.

After each step in your SAGE binder, there will be a notation “For Northwest Accreditation Purposes.” This notation will provide you with the section of the CD to review. By using your school data, you can work through not only the Nevada School Improvement model (SAGE) but the Northwest model at the same time. However, the Northwest model requires your school to establish a mission statement and 1-5 belief statements regarding your school. This is the only piece that is not found in both Nevada School Improvement (SAGE) planning and Northwest Accreditation School Improvement planning.

The CD also outlines the roles and relationships of the members of the Nevada State Committee for Northwest Association of Schools, Colleges, and Universities with schools participating in the process. A timeline is provided for organizing the activities to ensure timely and accurate completion of each part as well as information on the visitation and implementation of the plan created.

For additional information contact: Fawn Lewis (775) 687-9214 or Pam Salazar at (702) 895-1971.

Additional Steps in Using the SAGE Process to Complete Northwest Accreditation

SAGE Steps	Additional Steps to meet Northwest Accreditation
<p><i>Comprehensive Needs Assessment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect Data • Organize Data • Analyze the Student Achievement Results and Develop Student Achievement Goals • Analyze Data from the Five Dimensions of School Success to Identify Strengths, Concerns, and Underlying Reasons for the Goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As part of “Collect Data,” make sure the school collects data about “Instructional and Organizational Effectiveness” which is Part 4 in NSSE. Schools can often include survey items in the surveys completed by instructional and administrative staff to capture this information. Refer to the NSSE Manual to see what “Instructional and Organizational Effectiveness” encompasses. • After the school completes “Develop Goals,” the school can define the School’s Beliefs and Mission, which is Part 2 in NSSE. Schools might use the “School Beliefs Inventory” in the NSSE to help develop their school belief statements and use the steps in NSSE to develop their mission statement.
<p><i>Inquiry Process</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore and Verify the Causes of Each Concern • Investigate Possible Solutions • Select Solutions to Fit School Context 	
<p><i>Master Plan Design</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an Action Plan to Implement Each Solution • Integrate Action Plans into a Master School Improvement Plan • Create a Plan to Monitor Action Plans • Determine Measurable Objectives for Goals • Create a Plan to Evaluate Student Achievement and Supporting Goals 	<p>Make sure the Action Plans and Monitoring Plans are for five school years, which is required by Northwest Accreditation.</p>
<p><i>Implementation and Evaluation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor the Action Plan and Plan to Evaluate Goals • Create a Climate of Ongoing Review of School Improvement Activities 	<p>Complete the annual report for Northwest Accreditation</p>

Professional Development

A professional development program is: “The planned, coherent actions and support systems designed and implemented to develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, aspirations and behaviors to improve student achievement” (Killion, 2002, p.153).

One of the six essential foundations of school improvement in the SAGE school improvement guidebook is “Teacher Collaboration: Establish a Regular Time for Planning, Implementation, Monitoring, and Professional Development.” This foundation is a reminder to schools involved in the school improvement process that professional development needs to be consciously planned and consistently carried out with the focus of student achievement in mind.

Though the concept of professional development provokes much discussion and research abounds, foundational information is provided here in the context of three overarching questions.

1. Why is professional development essential for school improvement?

The major determinant of student academic progress is the classroom teacher.

Joellen Killion, Director of Special Projects for the National Staff Development Council, focuses on teacher quality and student learning. She states (2002, p. 22), “Studies and practices have provided evidence that there is a link between student achievement and quality teaching. Some students do perform better in particular classrooms than in others. Some schools with large populations of disadvantaged students are beating the odds and excelling (WestEd, 2001; The Charles A. Dana Center, 1999, 2000). In classrooms across the country, when teachers are applying research-based instruction and have deep content knowledge, students are achieving more.”

Therefore, the more deliberate, ongoing, and research-based the professional development is at our schools, the better chance we have of increasing student achievement.

In schools where there is high teacher turnover the quality of teaching decreases, followed by decreased student achievement. Professional development in our schools should be research-based, collaborative, and ongoing to create an atmosphere of mutual support, professionalism, and success in the classroom. This collaboration among teachers, with a focus on student achievement, develops a climate that entices teachers to remain at school sites, decreasing teacher turnover, thus supporting student achievement.

2. What must professional development look like to support teachers and principals in developing their full potential as professionals so that the school organization can be more effective in meeting the needs of all students?

Good professional development in a school can take on many forms but researchers do agree on some basic criteria. Good professional development that increases student learning:

- Requires extensive opportunities for ongoing, sustained learning;
- Contains collaborative dialogue about teaching and student learning;
- Shares work;
- Provides time for deep reflection;
- Encourages practice with continued support;
- Is based on research-based instructional strategies;
- Is guided by the needs of the students;
- Is aligned with the school's mission, beliefs, and goals;
- Involves all teachers and administrators; and
- Is driven by data-based decision-making.

Good professional development is not:

- One-shot or isolated;
- Front-end development of knowledge and skill with insufficient, long-term follow-up;
- Lacking resources; or
- Void of structures to promote deep change.

Creating a Professional Development Plan

Creating an effective professional development plan to support student achievement is a crucial part of school improvement planning. The professional development evaluation plan should include information about how the professional development program will work to produce the student academic achievement results, revealing the “transformative process” that starts with inputs and arrives at outputs/results.

Example of a Professional Development Plan (adapted from Assessing Impact by Killion, p. 27).

Resources	Input	Initial Outcomes	Intermediate Outcomes	Results
Trained Coaches	Teachers receive 30+ hours of instruction in research-based instructional strategies and classroom assessments.	Teachers' knowledge about teaching reading increases.	Teachers' capacity to provide differentiated, high quality reading instruction and to monitor student progress increases.	Achievement in reading increases for all students.
Time for Coaching	Teachers receive weekly coaching. Classroom schedules are altered.	Teachers gain understanding about students' reading difficulties.		Gains for underperforming students are significant.

Questions to Guide Professional Development Planning

Using the following questions as a guide will provide a foundation for an effective, comprehensive, long-range professional development program, supportive of school improvement:

- What are our school improvement goals and objectives?
- What do we want our students to know and be able to do? What are the essential outcomes per quarter or semester?
- How will we know our students have achieved that? How will we monitor student achievement? Is each student's achievement of the outcomes carefully monitored?
- What knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations and behaviors are needed but are not being achieved by students?
- How will we examine student work and reflect on instructional practice to monitor the effectiveness of educator practices and refine them in teaching all students what they need to know and be able to do to achieve the essential outcomes?
- What knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations and behaviors are needed by educators to meet the needs of the students?
- How will we provide opportunities for teachers to apply knowledge and practice new skills with feedback?
- Are there consistent application of the practices in the classroom and systemic support for continuous improvement?
- Do staff members work together to enhance their effectiveness in helping students achieve learning outcomes through multiple avenues of interaction and inquiry-oriented practices?
- What activities, resources, learning designs/structures, short term and intermediate steps go into a long-term professional development plan that will provide individual educators with the support they need to meet the needs of individual students and provide capacity for meeting the organizational goals?

Models of Professional Development

In designing a professional development plan, schools may benefit from considering the following models.

The RPTIM Model. The RPTIM model is a five-step approach that seeks to bring systemic change to schools through:

- Readiness (favorable conditions for change, formulation of goals);
- Planning (answers the question “How will the goals be met?”);
- Training (in-service workshop, action research teams, team-level, content area, or other small groups);
- Implementation of new knowledge and skills into practice; and
- Maintenance (can take many forms such as mentoring, peer coaching, self-analysis through reflection, classroom observations, collaborative dialogue) (Zepeda, 1999, p. 97-99).

The Problem-Based Learning Model. This model builds new knowledge and capacity for teachers. The process of this model includes identifying a problem situation as it relates to practice in the context of the classroom or the school, using guiding questions, developing objectives with timelines, and forming groups using a facilitator.

The Study Group Model. This model is based on the concept that teachers are effective as trainers in providing quality feedback to each other. This model establishes relevance for the individual and provides opportunities for collegial interaction in order to share ideas. A facilitator is used; this person can be an outside expert if the conditions are set by the needs of the learning community. There is ongoing evaluation of the impact of the facilitator in meeting professional development needs.

The Action Research Model. This model provides teachers with an opportunity to personalize research by investigating concerns within their classrooms. It strengthens their ability to engage in school restructuring. Teachers choose an instructional method or educational question they would like to research. The teachers use the strategy in the classroom or conduct their own inquiry to informally examine the impact of their practice and how it leads to new actions.

Individual Learning Plans. Individual learning plans assist the teachers in planning learning objectives for the year and aligning their own learning programs with the school and district goals.

Professional Learning Communities. The school is a “learning community, in which every member is a learner and is committed to his or her own learning as well as to the learning of other members of the community. In the learning community, the principal shares leadership with teachers and other professionals as they seek to maximize the learning capacity of the school” (Zepeda, 1999, p. xxi).

Best Practices for Supporting Professional Development

Tuning Protocol. Tuning protocol steps were developed to keep group meetings focused with specific roles for members to follow and a structured agenda with time limits. This structured guide organizes a way to work through a sequence of discussions efficiently. A teacher seeking feedback on instruction and student work can provide the background information, propose specific questions, and allow time for colleagues to respond.

Reflective Practice and Job-Embedded Learning. This design is used for improving teaching methods and strategies and provides an opportunity to discover what is working and not working, uncover personal strengths, and identify areas where improvement is needed. It is described as “learning by doing, reflecting on the experience, and then generating and sharing new insights and learning with oneself and others.” Some formal structures already in place that promote job-embedded learning are study groups, action research, and reflective logs.

Inquiry Cadres. Inquiry cadres are used to assist teachers in resolving challenges that may be school wide, grade level, departmental, or cross-subject. In these cadres, challenges are identified, strategies for overcoming the challenges are researched, and action plans for implementing the strategies are developed and evaluated (Sparks, p. 52).

Peer Coaching and Mentoring. In this practice, teachers help each other grow professionally by observing and conferencing with each other regarding self-perceived weaknesses.

Colleagues observe each other teach and record information about the class in order to identify patterns of teacher and learner behavior. These are then assessed based on the learning goals and weaknesses selected by the teacher. This practice is especially valuable for mentoring new teachers by veterans on staff.

Principal Roles

The roles of the principal are varied and complex: instructional leader, learning facilitator, resource manager, mediator, supervisor, and evaluator. "...The primary responsibility of the principal is the improvement of instruction and therefore the majority of the principal's time should be spent on curriculum and staff development" (Zepeda, 1999, p. 18). A meta-analysis of studies that examined successful instructional leaders identifies several basic practices that effective leaders share. The findings suggest that effective instructional leaders:

- Develop programs based not only on their own personal beliefs and values, but also based upon their knowledge and understanding of the specific needs of their schools and communities;
- Set high expectations within their schools and reinforce them through daily interactions with staff and students;
- Promote collaboration; and,
- Cultivate mutual trust among their teachers (Zepeda, 1999, p. 18).

Glickman (2002) states the principal, assistant principal, lead teacher, department head, curriculum director, etc., must understand that no one person can be the sole instructional leader. For continuous improvement there must be multiple leaders and structures for assisting and improving classroom teaching and learning such as peer coaching, critical friends, classroom action research teams, or study groups.

3. What resources will assist with designing a high-quality professional development program tied to school improvement?

Publications

Glickman, C. (2002). *Leadership for Learning: How to Help Teachers Succeed*. Alexandria, VA: Association For Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Joyce, B. and Showers, B. (2002). *Student Achievement through Staff Development (3rd edition)*. Alexandria, VA: Association For Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Killion, J. (2002). *Assessing Impact: Evaluating Staff Development*. Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.

Killion, J. (2001). *E-Learning for Educators: Implementing the Standards for Staff Development*. Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.

Killion, J. (2000). *Teachers Who Learn, Kids Who Achieve: A Look at Model Professional Development*. WestEd.

Killion, J. (2002). *What Works in the Elementary Grades: Results-Based Staff Development*. Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.

Killion, J. (2002). *What Works in the High School: Results-Based Staff Development*. Oxford, OH:National Staff Development Council.

Killion, J. (1999). *What Works in the Middle: Results-Based Staff Development*. National Staff Development Council. Oxford, OH:National Staff Development Council.

Schmoker, M. (2003). Planning for Failure?: Too Much of Schools' 'Improvement Planning' Misses the Mark. *Education Week*, February.

Sparks, D. (2002). *Designing Powerful Professional Development for Teachers and Principals*. Oxford, OH:National Staff Development Council.

Zepeda, S. (1999). *Staff Development: Practices that Promote Leadership in Learning Communities*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

Other Resources

National Staff Development Council's Standards for Staff Development, Revised. This is a guideline for developing a staff development program to sustain long-term changes for both educators and their students. www.nsdc.org

Nevada Department of Education. Professional Learning Communities – supplemental binder available through the Nevada Department of Education. This includes resource information for tapes on developing a PLC. Please contact Leslie James through the Department of Education website: www.doe.nv.gov

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future in the Summary Report "No Dream Denied."

National Staff Development Council, *Journal of Staff Development*, "Powerful Designs," summer 1999.

To be released fall 2003, temporarily entitled "Powerful Designs": This book, different from the journal article mentioned above, will list the structures of professional development such as action research, coaching, modeling; research and case studies.

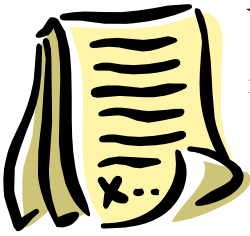
Web Sites

Annenberg Institute for School Reform. www.aisr.brown.edu

Northwest Regional Lab. This website serves as a good description of school improvement models such as Professional Learning Communities, Effective Schools, Accelerated Schools, and research by Carl Glickman. www.nwrel.org

Nevada Department of Education. www.doe.nv.gov

Rules and Regulations for Schoolwide Programs under the No Child Left Behind Act



While the Guidebook is designed to help all schools implement school improvement, the Guidebook contains information to aid schools implementing the schoolwide option under Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act.

The rules and regulations on schoolwide programs have changed considerably over the last 20 years. Due to the success of schoolwide programs, the changes in schoolwide program rules and regulations have made the schoolwide option available to more and more schools. The underlying belief is that “schoolwide programs work.”

The schoolwide option began in 1978 with Title I legislation that allowed districts to use Title I funds to improve entire school programs. The legislation required that at least 75 percent of the children enrolled at a school be from low-income families and that the local educational agency (LEA) contribute matching funds. Only a few schools took advantage of this opportunity because most districts were unable to provide matching funds.

In 1988, the Hawkins-Stafford Amendments to Title I (then Chapter 1) eliminated the matching fund requirement. Instead, the school district had to make sufficient Title I funds available to schoolwide schools so that the funds provided for each educationally disadvantaged student in a Title I schoolwide equaled or exceeded the amount provided for each Title I student in other Title I schools. These changes led to a dramatic increase in the number of schoolwide programs.

Title I under the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) of 1994 further expanded the schoolwide option by reducing the required poverty level to 50 percent. It also enhanced the effectiveness of schoolwide approaches by permitting schoolwide programs to incorporate funds from state and local programs, requiring a one-year planning period to encourage stronger planning and meaningful change and technical assistance to help schools develop effective schoolwide plans and implementations, and encouraging quality professional development.

Title I under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 continues the underlying belief in the schoolwide option and further expands its adoption. The legislation:

- Reduces the percentage of poverty¹ needed to qualify for the schoolwide program option to 40 percent,
- Frees schools from identifying particular children as eligible to participate in the schoolwide program,
- Exempts schoolwide programs from statutory and regulatory provisions of any other Federal grant program (other than programs under Individuals with Disabilities

¹Schools may determine "percent in poverty" based on students who live in the eligible attendance area or students enrolled at the school.

Education Act) that supports the schoolwide program if the intent and purposes of such programs are met, and

- Requires schools to devote sufficient resources for professional development to ensure high quality and ongoing professional development so that all children reach State standards, including entering into a consortium with another school to carry out such activities.

Required Planning and Program Components

Under the No Child Left Behind Act, a schoolwide program is required to:

- Complete a comprehensive needs assessment of all children, including migratory children, in the school based on the state's standards;
- Implement schoolwide reform strategies that:
 - Provide opportunities for all children to meet State standards,
 - Utilize effective instructional strategies based on scientifically based research that strengthens the core academic program, increases the amount and quality of learning time, such as providing an extended school year and before- and after-school and summer programs and opportunities, helps provide an enriched and accelerated curriculum, and includes strategies that meet the educational needs of historically underserved populations,
 - Include strategies that address the needs of **all** children in the school, but particularly the needs of children who are members of the target population of any component of the schoolwide program, such as counseling, pupil services, mentoring, college and career awareness and preparation, and the integration of vocational and technical education programs, and address how the school will determine if such needs have been met, and
 - Are consistent with, and are designed to implement, the State and local improvement plans, if any;
- Provide instruction by highly qualified professional staff;
- Support intensive and sustained professional development;
- Attract high-quality highly qualified teachers;
- Reinforce strong parent involvement by including, for example, the provision of family literacy services;
- Assist preschool children with the transition from early childhood programs to local elementary school programs;
- Include teachers in decisions regarding the use of assessments, and provide training on how to use assessments to improve student performance and instructional practices;

- Provide timely, effective assistance to students who experience difficulty in meeting State standards, including taking specific steps to involve parents in helping their children meet the standards; and
- Coordinate and integrate Federal, State, and local services and programs, including programs supported under this Act.

Schoolwide Program Plan

Each school's comprehensive schoolwide program plan must:

- Be developed (or amended if developed before NCLB) in consultation with the LEA and its school support team or other technical assistance provider, and—
 - Address the 10 components described above,
 - Describe how Title I funds and funds from other sources will be used to implement these components,
 - Include a list of state, LEA, and federal programs that will be included in the schoolwide program, and
 - Describe how the school will provide individual assessment results to parents.
- The comprehensive plan shall be—
 - Developed during a one-year planning period, unless it is determined that less time is needed or the school is already operating a schoolwide program on the NCLB enactment date (in which case the school has one year to amend the plan to meet new requirements under NCLB),
 - Developed with the involvement of parents and other members of the community to be served and the individuals who will carry out the plan,
 - In effect for the duration of the school's participation in NCLB and reviewed and revised, as necessary,
 - Available to the local education agency, parents, and the public, using an understandable and uniform format, and provided, to the extent practical, in a language that parents can understand,
 - Be developed, where appropriate, in coordination with programs under Reading First, Early Reading First, Even Start, Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act of 1998, and the Head Start Act.

Pre-Kindergarten Program

A school that is eligible for a schoolwide program may use funds to establish or enhance prekindergarten programs for children under the age of 6, such as Even Start programs or Early Reading First programs.

School Improvement Plan Revision Guidelines For Second Year and Beyond

Introduction

The following outline is intended to guide schools through the SAGE (Student Achievement Gap Elimination) school improvement process in order to revise an existing plan, not to create a brand new plan. This process makes some assumptions about activities in which the school already has engaged regarding school improvement. These assumptions are consistent with the fourth step of the SAGE process: Implementation and Evaluation. This plan review makes SAGE a continuous planning process. It starts with Step Four: Implementation and Evaluation and circles back through the other three steps of SAGE: Comprehensive Needs Assessment, Inquiry, and Master Plan Design.

Helpful information, tools, and the plan template are available electronically at www.nevadasage.org, or in the SAGE School Improvement Guidebook available through the Department of Education.

Begin by convening the School Improvement Planning (SIP) team.

Assumptions:

- 1) The School Improvement Planning Team has met several times during the year to monitor plan completion.**
- 2) The School Improvement Planning Team has collected information on how well activities, especially changes in instruction, were implemented.**
- 3) The school improvement plan is focused on “improved instruction.”**

I. Process for Plan Review (Evaluation):

1. Review Goals: Did the school achieve its performance levels as stated in its previous year’s goal(s)? (Use “Plan to Evaluate Goals” from Master Plan Design)
2. Review Implementation (regardless of whether the school achieved its goals or not).
 - Review Action Plan
 - Review Monitoring Plan
 - Determine what was implemented and what was not.
 - Determine how well the steps were implemented.
 - If certain steps were not implemented well, determine why.
 - Especially important, determine how well the school/teachers implemented changes in improved instruction as outlined in the plan.

II. Review New Data (Needs Assessment):

1. Review AYP Data: Identify any new subjects or subgroups that must be addressed in the revised plan.
2. Review Other Assessment Data: Review other, more comprehensive student achievement data to identify areas (content strands, abilities, standards) where students have not made acceptable

achievement gains or have low achievement levels. Use this information to also look at areas of growth. Some examples of data might be:

- District tests
- School assessments
- Classroom assessments

3. Other Data: Review any other data related to the five dimensions of school success (School Community Characteristics; Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Intervention; Learning Environment and School Culture; Parent and Community Involvement; Professional Development). Look especially at any areas that have caused change in the school and determine what implications those changes may have for school improvement. Some information to consider may be:

- Annual surveys
- Changes in student, teacher, and/or administrative populations

III. Confirm and/or Revise the Goals, if necessary:

1. Based on the information revealed from the plan review and the review of the new data, confirm the existing goal(s) or revise the goal(s). Typically, a school will not have a new goal unless there is a new content area or subgroup in need of improvement or if a review of other data suggests a new goal.

IV. Inquiry:

1. Conduct an Inquiry for any new goals or for any new content areas or subgroups.

V. New Goals, if any (Master Plan Design):

1. Create a measurable objective for the new goal.
2. Create new Action and Monitoring Plans for any new goals.

VI. Enter Changes in the Existing Action Plans, Monitoring Plans, and Plan to Evaluate Goals (Master Plan Design):

1. Revise objectives for continuing goal(s) based on data, if necessary.
2. Revise the plan by recording the newest changes in bold or italics but removing information that is older than one year
3. Remember to adjust all the information in the various columns in the revised plan, such as Resources and Entity Responsible.

VII. Due Date:

School Improvement Plans/Revised Plans are by law due to the district on November 1. Check with your district or region for any other important or different due dates.

SAGE

School Improvement in Nevada for Student Achievement Gap Elimination

Summary of SAGE

Steps and Foundations for School Improvement

Nevada Department of Education
July 2005

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

What is it and Why?

An elementary or secondary school that fails to make **adequate yearly progress (AYP)** for two consecutive years will be designated by its school district as a school in need of improvement. Each school identified for school improvement must, within three months after being identified, develop or revise a school plan in consultation with school staff, the school district serving the school, and outside experts. For Title I schools in improvement, this activity is in accordance with **No Child Left Behind (NCLB)**. For non-Title I schools in improvement, this requirement is established by state legislation (**NRS 385**). Besides fulfilling the legislative requirements, the goal of school improvement (through a school improvement plan) is to increase student achievement at the school.

School Improvement Plans

In order to comply with NCLB and NRS 385, all schools must submit a school improvement plan or revised plan to their district by November 1 of each year.

- Non-Title I schools and Title I schools not in improvement or non-Title I schools and Title I schools that did not make AYP for one year may choose, with the approval of the district, which school improvement plan **template** they will use to submit their school improvement plan. However, the SAGE school improvement plan is highly recommended for all schools as it reflects the points of law under both NCLB and NRS 385. More importantly, though, this plan reflects the thoughtful process in which schools should engage during the school improvement planning process.
- Non-Title I schools that fall into improvement may also choose their school improvement plan template, with approval from the district, adding the minor additions that are required for a non-Title I school in improvement. However, a non-Title I school may also choose to follow the SAGE process and use the accompanying SAGE school improvement plan, with the approval of the school district.
- Title I schools in improvement must use the SAGE process and the accompanying school improvement plan template. Title I improvement plans must be peer-reviewed by the school district according to the criteria established by the Nevada State Board of Education.

School improvement plans for all schools must adhere to the following components:

1. Include a review of the school's accountability report and other data;
2. Include an identification of problems and/or factors causing the school to be in improvement;
3. Use scientifically-based research strategies to strengthen the core academics;
4. Adopt policies and practices concerning the school's core academic subjects that have the greatest likelihood of ensuring that all groups of students will meet State standards;
5. Establish specific annual, measurable objectives for continuous and substantial progress by each group of students to make adequate yearly progress to meet the State standards;
6. Include strategies to promote effective parental involvement in the school;

7. Incorporate, as appropriate, activities of remedial instruction or tutoring before school, after school, during the summer, and during any extension of the school year;
8. Determine strategies to improve achievement;
9. Specify the responsibilities of the school, the local educational agency, and the State educational agency serving the school under the plan, including the technical assistance to be provided by the local educational agency and the local educational agency's responsibilities;
10. Establish a timeline;
11. Develop measurable criteria for evaluating effectiveness of each provision in the plan (including increasing achievement, attendance or decreasing dropouts);
12. Describe resources available to the school to carry out the plan;
13. Provide a summary of effectiveness of Legislative appropriations to improve achievement and of programs approved by the Legislature.

According to NRS 385, Non-Title I schools that fail AYP for two consecutive years must also comply with NCLB 6316(b)(3). Therefore, **Non-Title I schools that are designated in improvement** must complete two additional requirements, numbers 15 and 17 listed below, and include them in their school improvement plan.

For Title I schools in improvement, plans must cover a two-year period and the four additional components below must be addressed:

14. Assure the school will spend at least 10 percent of the school improvement funds to provide high-quality professional development to the school's teachers and principal that –
 - Directly addresses the academic achievement problem that caused the school to be identified for school improvement,
 - Meets the requirements for professional development activities, and
 - Is provided in a manner that helps teachers participate in the professional development;
15. Describe how the school will provide written notice about the identification to parents in a format and, to the extent practicable, in a language that the parents can understand;
16. Specify how the Title I funds will be used to remove the school from school improvement; and
17. Incorporate a teacher mentoring program.

What happens once the school improvement plan is developed, written, and approved?

Schools identified for school improvement must implement the school plan (or a revised plan) no later than the beginning of the next full school year after identification. However, schools typically implement their plan as soon as it is approved by their school district.

School improvement plans are action plans created to activate change within schools in order to improve student achievement. Implementing a school improvement plan is a process, requiring continuous monitoring and evaluation by members of the School Improvement Planning (SIP)/Implementation Team as well as other staff members. Writing the school

improvement plan is only the beginning and the success of this plan is contingent upon all those who have committed to implement it.

In addition, the school improvement plan itself can be a useful tool in other educational initiatives, such as the Northwest Accreditation (NWA) process or applying for remediation funding.

SAGE: STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT GAP ELIMINATION

What is it?

SAGE is the required school improvement process for Title I schools in Nevada that are designated as needing improvement. However, SAGE is recommended for all other schools identified as needing improvement, and can be utilized for any school wishing to complete a significant self-examination to improve status quo.

The purpose of SAGE is to help administrators, teachers, parents, and community members to lay the groundwork for school improvement, understand the process of school improvement, identify potential barriers, and develop a way to move the school from where it is now to an environment in which all students can achieve to their highest potential.

Many Nevada school districts and schools have used the improvement process outlined in SAGE to improve student learning. SAGE presents school improvement as a four-step cycle that includes:

1. A comprehensive needs assessment to identify strengths, concerns, and goals;
2. An inquiry process to identify causes and possible solutions;
3. A master plan design that outlines how the solutions will be implemented, monitored, and evaluated; and
4. A plan to actualize and support the implementation and evaluation of the school improvement plan.

Once the initial plan has been developed and implemented, the four steps are repeated and become part of a continuous improvement cycle in which the school will regularly monitor and renew the school improvement plan as needed.

However, following the four-step school improvement planning cycle alone does not ensure a quality plan that produces changes in the core academic curriculum and increased student learning. Other elements of support must also be addressed to facilitate the success of school improvement planning efforts. SAGE proposes six essential foundations to support school improvement which planning teams should address both when developing a school improvement plan and working on implementation. Attending to these six essential foundations helps planning teams better ensure successful school improvement. These six foundations are briefly defined below.

1. Establish a Governance Structure for School Improvement: Create a School Improvement Planning (SIP) Team at the School Site

The governance structure for school improvement is the group of individuals who manage the school improvement effort by first examining data, creating the plan, and then monitoring its implementation. Research has found that the most common management change is to increase collaboration and accountability among teachers. A committee that includes teachers, parents, and administrators most successfully manages school improvement efforts.

2. Agree to a Decision-Making Process for School Improvement

The school improvement planning team must establish a system or process for how it will make decisions about the school's improvement efforts. There are many ways to make decisions, whether by consensus, majority, or two-thirds vote—to name a few. The particular way is less important, but everyone must understand and be comfortable with the way that is agreed upon.

3. Teacher Collaboration: Establish a Regular Time for Planning, Monitoring, and Professional Development

It will be crucial to the success of the school improvement efforts for schools to build time into the schedule to monitor implementation, train teachers in new instructional strategies, and create ways to support ongoing professional development. All of these initiatives require that the school establish regular meeting time for staff to make sure school improvement activities occur in a timely, meaningful manner.

4. Encourage Team Building

Team building plays an important role in the success of school improvement planning. The internal task of team building is as important as the group's external task of making improvements. Nevertheless, teams and schools often underestimate the need to develop and sustain themselves as teams and the work required to do so. When a team runs smoothly, members can concentrate on their primary goal of improving student learning.

5. Plan for and Manage Change

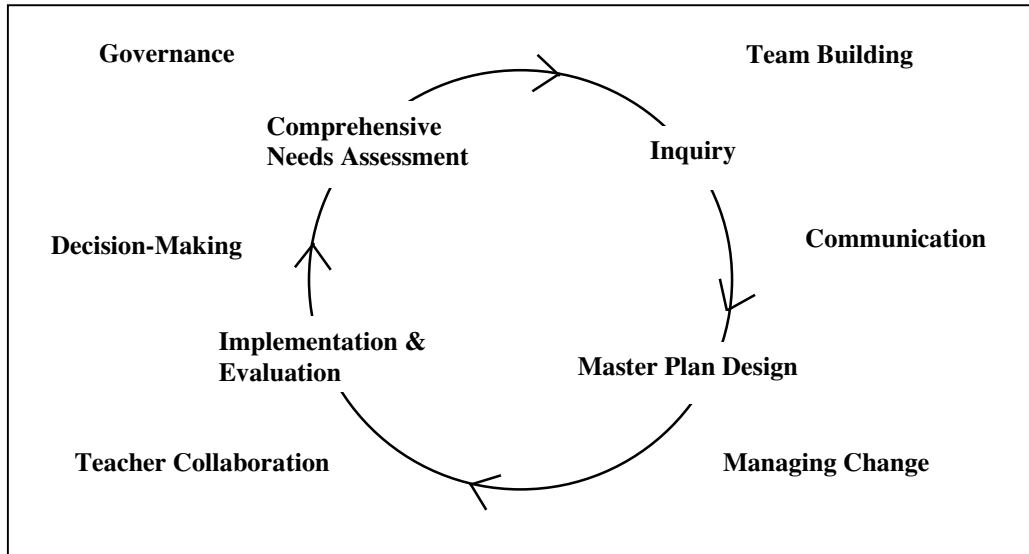
Initial resistance to change in schools is predictable. It is also manageable. The emphasis must not be on simply overcoming the resistance to change but instead on getting the school staff to undertake the journey as a team. An important task for the planning team is to overcome resistance by planning for change. Schools that do not plan for change by helping staff make the transition may easily get bogged down in staff resistance.

6. Communicate to Staff and the School Community about School Improvement

Communication is central to school improvement efforts. Open communication encourages team building; helps prepare people for change; informs staff, parents, and the community about the school improvement effort and how it will be implemented; and identifies people's

roles in these efforts. The school improvement planning team must develop a system to keep the entire staff informed and involved throughout the entire process.

The following figure presents a visual model of the school improvement process and the six essential foundations as presented in the SAGE process:



STEP ONE - Comprehensive Needs Assessment

What is it?

The Comprehensive Needs Assessment is a systematic process of gathering data about the school to develop a **school profile** and identify goals for increased student achievement. A clear picture of the school's current status must be created by examining the collected data. Data collection and discussion will be guided by questions found in the **Data Analysis Guide (DAG)**. A school will first examine student achievement data and establish academic goals for improvement. Other data will then be examined from five dimensions of school success: school community characteristics; curriculum, instruction, assessment, and intervention; learning environment and school culture; parent and community involvement; and professional development in order to identify concerns that the school will need to address in order to increase student learning and reach the identified academic goal(s). SIP teams will need to use and examine a variety of data sources and tools, such as school demographics; student assessment results; classroom observations; parent, teacher, and/or student surveys; focus groups and interviews, in order to answer the critical questions found in the Data Analysis Guide.

Tasks/Activities:

- Collect data
- Organize the data
- Analyze the student achievement results and develop student achievement goals
- Analyze data from the five dimensions of school success to identify strengths, concerns, and underlying reasons for the goals

Tools/Materials:

- SAGE Data Analysis Guide
- Different types of data.

The table below identifies sources and tools for collecting data in the area of student achievement and the five dimensions of school success.

Dimension → Data Tool ↓	Student Achievement	School Community Characteristics	Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, & Intervention	Learning Environment and School Culture	Parent and Community Involvement	Professional Development
Student Assessments	X		X			X
Demographic Data	X	X	X	X	X	X
Observations			X	X		X
Surveys			X	X	X	X
Interviews			X	X	X	X
Focus Groups			X	X	X	X

Estimated Timeline or Time Expenditure:

This initial step in the school improvement process consumes approximately 60% of the SIP team's total time in creating a school improvement plan. Typically, SIP teams take 1 to 2 all day meetings plus some investigative time between meetings to collect data. After that, add a meeting to analyze student achievement data and to identify goals. Finally, expect a half-day SIP meeting to examine other data in order to identify strengths and concerns in light of the chosen goal(s).

STEP TWO – The Inquiry Process***What is it?***

The Inquiry process is a creative problem-solving process where the SIP team discovers the underlying causes of the concerns identified during the needs assessment, verifies that the causes are valid, investigates possible research-based solutions to address the causes under the identified goal(s), and selects solutions to fit the school context. All staff can, and should, be involved in the inquiry process. The SIP team may find it helpful to have team members head subcommittees made up of staff members that investigate causes and possible research-based solutions according to their interest or expertise.

Tasks/Activities:

- Explore and verify the causes of each concern
- Investigate possible solutions that address the causes under the identified goal(s)
- Select research-based solutions to fit the school context

Tools/Materials:

- Inquiry worksheets
- District, state, or other educational institution resources
- Research and education literature and websites
- Collected data

Estimated Timeline or Time Expenditure:

The second step in the school improvement process takes approximately 20% of the SIP team's total time in creating a school improvement plan. The SIP team will identify who will research the causes and possible solutions. Time for researching is variable and may require as little as a couple of hours to as much as a full day. Teamwork and staff involvement may alleviate duplication of effort and time investment.

STEP THREE – Master Plan Design

What is it?

The Master Plan Design is the “nuts and bolts” phase of the planning process. It articulates what the staff hopes to achieve through the school improvement plan and how they will achieve it. During this phase, the SIP team outlines how the school will implement the solutions selected during the inquiry process (step two). The SIP team organizes the solutions into **action plans** that support the goal(s) and creates **monitoring plans** to assess the completion of the action steps. The SIP team will then develop measurable **objectives** based on the goals they established during the comprehensive needs assessment in step one. Finally, **plans to evaluate** the success and implementation of the school improvement plan are developed.

Tasks/Activities:

- Develop action plans for how each solution will be implemented
- Integrate the action plans into a master plan, reviewing the plan for consistency and timeline
- Write a monitoring plan for each action plan
- Develop measurable objectives for goals
- Create a plan to evaluate student achievement and supporting goals

Tools/Materials:

- Master Plan Design worksheets
- Comprehensive Needs Assessment data

Estimated Timeline or Time Expenditure:

This third step in the school improvement process consumes approximately 20% of the SIP team's total time in creating and writing the school improvement plan. Collaboration is necessary so that agreement can be reached as to how to implement the solutions to achieve the goals. Typically, SIP teams take about 1 full day of meeting to generate this information. After the plan is finished, the SIP team shares what has been developed with the entire staff.

STEP FOUR – Implementation and Evaluation

What is it?

Implementation and Evaluation is the actual “doing” of the school improvement plan. Implementation begins once the district approves the plan. The SIP team continues in the capacity of an implementation team, supported by the whole staff. The team uses the monitoring plans as a guide to ensure that the school improvement plan is moving forward as written. The evaluation plans are used to monitor improvement over time. The implementation team is also responsible for finding ways to keep the school improvement plan in the forefront for the whole school.

Tasks/Activities:

- Monitor the action plan and the plan to evaluate goals by consistently collecting and reviewing data on the student achievement and supporting goals
- Create a climate of ongoing review of school improvement activities

Tools/Materials:

- Monitoring and Evaluation plans
- Implementation worksheet

Estimated Timeline or Time Expenditure:

Step Four is essentially a year-long process. The implementation team generally commits to monthly school improvement plan monitoring meetings; however, meeting schedules can vary from school to school. The whole staff should be involved in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the school improvement plan.

GLOSSARY

Action Plan – An action plan is a clear description of how each solution will be implemented. An action plan identifies the structures and practices that are already in place as well as what needs to be put in place to support achievement of the school improvement goals.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) – No Child Left Behind requires each state to define adequate yearly progress for school districts and schools, within the parameters set by Title I. In defining AYP, each state sets the minimum levels of improvement – measurable in terms of student performance – that school districts and schools must achieve within time frames specified in the law. The ultimate goal is that by 2013-2014 all students in the state will be achieving at the proficient level on state assessments in reading/language arts and math.

Data Analysis Guide (DAG) – The Data Analysis Guide is a bank of questions about student achievement and best practice in each of the five dimensions of school success (school community characteristics; curriculum, instruction, assessment, and intervention; learning environment and school culture; parent and community involvement; and professional development). The questions are meant to serve as a guide to the collection and analysis of data during comprehensive needs assessment.

Goals – A goal is the overall plan or big picture outcome for a content area. The SIP team and staff select the goals, focusing on student achievement. Goals give the SIP team the direction they need to continue the inquiry process.

Implementation Plan – The Implementation Plan is written as a plan to develop activities that promote the school improvement goals. By using this plan the Implementation Team can establish a system to keep the school improvement plan activities in the forefront at the school.

Monitoring and Evaluation Plans – The Monitoring and Evaluation Plans are written as part of the master plan to monitor the action steps of the school improvement plan and to evaluate the success of the plan in terms of the goal(s). By using these plans, the Implementation Team has a system to follow to determine the extent to which the actions steps are implemented and how well.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) – NCLB is a federal education reform act designed to improve student achievement for all students. The NCLB Act of 2001 expands the rules and regulations for school accountability to ensure that all students meet State standards. NCLB also changes how states determine whether schools make AYP and delineates the school improvement procedures and consequences when schools do not make adequate yearly progress.

NRS 385 –NRS 385 is Nevada legislation from the 2003 Nevada Legislative Special Session that melds Nevada’s educational reformation activities with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. NRS 385 contains over 120 sections, which cover the various activities that are necessary to fully implement the federally legislated NCLB.

Objectives – The objective is the refined goal. It contains five parts: the goal statement itself, an outcome indicator, a baseline, the standard or performance level, and a timeline. Objectives can be long-term and short-term.

Safe Harbor – In order to make AYP through “Safe Harbor,” the school’s population who fails to meet the state’s annual target in a subject area must decrease the percent of nonproficient students in that group by 10%. This applies to the whole school population and every subpopulation that does not make AYP. Additionally, the school must demonstrate improvement on the “other indicator,” which for elementary and middle schools is attendance and for high schools is the graduation rate.

School Profile – The final result of the comprehensive needs assessment is the school profile. The school profile is a compilation of the school’s Accountability Report and other data collected during the comprehensive needs assessment. The school profile is an important picture of the school and it will be submitted as part of the school improvement plan.

Template – A school improvement plan template has been developed that provides an example and/or outline of what a school improvement plan looks like and should include. SIP teams should utilize the template when writing and constructing their improvement plan.